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THE NEW GODIVA

AND

OTHER STUDIES IN SOCIAL QUESTIONS

"GIVE ME THAT THERE MAY BE LESS VICE AND MORE VIRTUE FOR
MY SPEAKING."—*Vox Clamantis*

"BREAKING THE SILENCE OF SHAME, IF HAPLY WE MAY ATTAIN
AT LAST, THROUGH A TRANSITION TIME OF PERPETUAL AGONY, TO
THE SILENCE OF SANCTITY."

NEW YORK

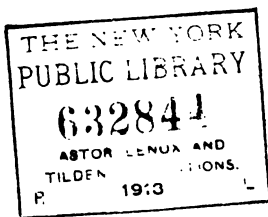
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To a Woman

WHOSE ILLUSTRIOUS NAME WILL ONE DAY
AS FAR OUTSHINE THE NAMES OF OTHER RENOWNED
WOMEN, HER FORERUNNERS,
AS HER ACHIEVEMENTS WILL BE SEEN
TO HAVE SURPASSED THEIRS IN MAGNITUDE AND IN

HEROISM—TO

JOSEPHINE BUTLER

THIS LITTLE BOOK IS REVERENTLY

Dedicated.

WATER
WATER
WATER

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Reviews, 28 Nov. 1912. 11d.




INTRODUCTION.

THE five "Studies" contained in this little volume were written before the attention of the country—nay, of Europe and America—was drawn to the subjects with which they deal. I say advisedly "to the subjects with which they deal." For, although the action of the leading journal which has recently electrified the civilized world by daring to lay open what the world prefers to conceal was directed exclusively against crime—and these essays combat rather what is commonly distinguished as vice—I make bold to assert that the aims which inspired them and those which guided the writers in *The Pall Mall Gazette* are practically identical. In deference to the ordinary convention



which draws a hard-and-fast distinction between vice and crime, and in view of a practical object which they had set themselves to gain in the immediate future, the little band of heroes who staked fortune, reputation, and even life, in the endeavour to unmask the hidden wickedness of our modern Babylon, restricted themselves, very wisely, to a certain limited area. But they knew very well, as every one knows who has given serious thought to the subject, that the hideous iniquity which they were attacking was, after all, but the fruit of a tree which has its roots firmly planted in our vaunted civilization, and which draws its sustenance from our own families, our own households, our own individual carelessness, callousness, or blindness.

This truth was well expressed by *The Manchester Guardian* of July 15th, quoted by *The Pall Mall Gazette* of the same date, among other press comments on their procedure. It was one of the very few public criticisms that, in homely phrase, hit the right nail on the head. Many were warmly sym-



pathetic, very many sound and well-intentioned—this one, almost alone, as far as I know—indicated complete realization on the part of the press of the true significance of the matter in hand. *The Manchester Guardian* did not commit itself to approval of the *manner* in which the blow was struck. “The thing, however,” it observed, in words which I venture to think admirably to the point—“The thing has been done, and the effect produced. It has not been done without some cost ; but it is easy to exaggerate the evils arising from outraged propriety. *If the evils which cause propriety to be outraged*” (the italics are mine) “can be mitigated even in a slight degree by the exposure ; if, above all, public feeling can be roused to protest and fight against *the atrocious laxity of the current moral code of which the crimes here recorded are but the last and most terrible outcome*—we can forgive a good deal to the authors of the change.”

There is here a distinct recognition of the fact that the aforesaid convention which marks off vice from crime—that is, offences punishable, or which

should be punishable, by the tribunal of opinion from offences punishable, or which should be punishable, by law—is one which is apt to be a great deal too much accentuated. The distinction is, after all, a purely arbitrary one, adopted solely from motives of expediency, and though it must of course continue to exist—at any rate until popular notions of good and ill, right and wrong, legality and illegality, are something widely different from what they are at present—it is one which we should be extremely careful not to press too far. The inference to ordinary minds from this drawing of a sharp line of demarcation where nature has drawn none is that only crime is criminal, and that vice is more or less venial. It is forgotten that the one borders so closely on the other that the vicious man becomes the criminal almost without knowing it—witness the enormous percentage of crimes directly traceable to drunkenness. And it is also forgotten that the often incalculable injury, physical and moral, wrought by offenders against what, in contradistinction to the law of man, I will

call the law of God, is not the less damnable because it is not actionable.

There is no *permanent* way of ridding the world of its Minotaurs and of the fiendish cruelties they perpetrate, just as there is no permanent way of cleansing it of the countless lesser evils occasioned by impurity, except a radical change—a revolution in fact—in public opinion with regard to all such questions.

Now such a revolution has been silently in progress for years—for twenty years at least—and in obscurity, in obloquy, in sorrow and heaviness of spirit, good men and women have been toiling early and late to overthrow the apathy, the selfishness, the shortsightedness which have refused to face these things, and to break the conspiracy of silence which, more than anything else, has obstructed their path. The death-blow dealt to this last by a powerful organ of opinion is, from one point of view, the result of their unrecognized but incessant and indefatigable labours. From another it is the dawning of a new day for them, a solace

on the way, an inspiring trumpet-blast before which they know that the outworks, at any rate, of the enemy's citadel must infallibly totter and fall. They will work on now with good hope and with fresh courage, nor will they rest until they have compassed, not merely the legislative changes which appear to them to be urgently called for, but also such a sensible modification of public opinion as shall cut to the root of the evils they condemn.

It is as a humble contribution to this latter task that this little book is offered to the public. If the prayer which I have borrowed from old John Gower for my title-page be in however small a measure answered; if these "Studies" help, even a little, to undermine "*the atrocious laxity of the current moral code of which the crimes*" revealed by *The Pall Mall Gazette* "*are but the last and most terrible outcome*"—the pain which it has cost me to write them will be a thing which I shall be ashamed even to name.

I offer no apology for the circumstance that four



out of the five have appeared before — “The Sanction of Purenness” in *Modern Thought*; “Puissance Oblige” in the *Cambridge Review*; “The New Godiva” as a pamphlet (Isbister and Co.); “The Western Harem” in the *Westminster Review*.¹ Each has hitherto reached but a limited circle of readers. My hope is that in their present guise, they may appeal to a wider one, and may help to “stablish, strengthen, settle,” doubting spirits and grief-stricken hearts at this juncture. They are, moreover, not quite of the character of the ordinary review article. They were written with a degree of care, and, I may add, of emotion which, I suppose, seldom attend the efforts of the magazine writer, as commonly understood; and, however presumptuously, however mistakenly, they aspired, from the first, to something a little less ephemeral than a momentary existence in the pages of a periodical.

¹ This paper appeared in the *Westminster Review* as “The Christian Harem.” It has since been reprinted in pamphlet form. (Hatchards.)

I have printed them here in the order in which they were written, because of a certain continuity and development of thought running through the series. It is my wish that the subject should grow and take shape in the reader's mind as during some five years it grew and took shape in my own

Contrary however to the usual practice, I have named the book from the third instead of from the first "study." The reason is that "The New Godiva" is the best known of those which have been already in print, and has, upon the whole, I believe, found the most favour.

Since the last paper, on "Zola in England," was written in the winter, the strides which French "realism," whether in literature, art, or manners, has been making in this country seem to endow it with a fresh *raison d'être*. We have now a "realistic" school of fiction of our own, and, unless we make a resolute stand against the inroads of a debased art, as unsound æsthetically as it is noxious morally, it will presently flourish in London, as it flourishes now in Paris.

Here is a field for moral reform not less important than rescue-work, than preventive work, than the work of White Cross Armies and Social Purity Alliances, than the uncompromising insistence on "clean living" in those we admit to our intimacy or elect for our rulers, than the making of good laws, and the unmaking of bad ones. And here, as in all departments of their heroic labours, do I bid the reformers a heartfelt Godspeed !

THE AUTHOR.

August, 1885.



THE SANCTION OF PURENESS.



“Wir heissen euch hoffen.”

GOETHE.

THERE is perhaps no important question upon which public opinion is in a more curiously unsettled and conflicting state than upon that which—using the term in its more restricted sense—we imply when we speak of the relation of the sexes.

Upon other grave moral points there is a certain consensus of opinion—varying, of course, with race, climate, religious creed, and so forth, but, upon the whole, sufficiently unanimous—throughout the civilized world. We are pretty well agreed, for example, that

homicide is, in the vast majority of instances, unlawful, and if, on the confines of Europe, there are still semi-barbaric potentates who think as little of bowstringing an unfaithful wife or an insubordinate minister as we do of slaughtering a fox or a pigeon, we have, on the other hand, in the country whose great boast is her pre-eminence in all that is understood by civilization, a growing tenderness for human life which threatens to overreach itself. That persons still living should have heard in their youth of hungry wretches being hanged for sheep-stealing, and have proceeded to breakfast with a placid acquiescence in the flawless majesty of our glorious constitution, is a state of things which, at this time of day, the imagination refuses to picture. We can account for it only by the aid of a progressive theory of morals, reflecting that as late as the seventeenth century we burned witches wholesale, and that it was only, as it were, yesterday that we ceased to hang our murderers in public.

It is sufficiently evident that in this very

matter of killing we have not yet reached the *dernier mot* of enlightened, human reason. The total abolition of capital punishment has been and will be again a moot point ; duelling has yet to be branded with the ignominy which will effectually stamp it out ; and the objectors to the taking of life in war, although undoubtedly on the increase, are yet but a feeble folk. For all practical purposes, however, we have, in regard to this elementary problem of ethics, arrived at what may be termed an advanced stage—a stage which it is not rash to predict will lead to other and higher ones, a stage in which we are all of one mind, practically, as to what our behaviour should be.

It is the same with another primitive moral law—the law of honesty. There are no dissentient voices in the chorus of reprobation which greets the discovery of—say, a shady commercial transaction—any more than there are cavillers at the apprehension of a pick-pocket by a policeman ; and the world having outgrown by several generations what we may

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term the *juvenile criminal* phase of thought in regard to such matters, respects Rob Roy as little as Robin Hood, and sends to gaol believers in "the good old rule"—

"The simple plan,
That they should take who have the power,
And they should keep who can."

Even in quarters where the moral code is based not upon principle, but upon what is humorously called honour, and where, in consequence, a considerable proportion of the virtues are left out in the cold, great stress is laid upon this particular virtue of upright dealing. The man who cheats at cards or forges a name to a bill forfeits his social status beyond the possibility of retrieval, and even he who speculates with other peoples' money runs the risk of being ostracised by "society"—without close attention to society's eleventh commandment: "Thou shalt not be found out."

And as it is with the more primitive, so it is with the later developments of morality. To take two instances only. What a strong

balance of opinion there is at the present time in favour of sobriety and temperance ; and in the changed attitude of man towards the lower orders of creation what a revolution has overtaken the world ! The drunkard and the glutton, though they are still to be found in all ranks of society, are everywhere treated with justly merited contempt ; intemperance is "bad form;" it is, on the whole, regarded as a plebeian vice, the prerogative of crass ignorance and dull-eyed, vulgar misery. In like manner it is only as a survival of a lower stage of our development that the grosser forms of cruelty to animals linger in our midst. Every Englishman, at any rate, of average education and good feeling, hears with an angry disgust of the revolting sport of bull-fighting being still practised from time to time in Spain, and witnesses the barbarity of the Italian peasant to his cattle with instinctive, if ineffectual, indignation.

That he will one day become alive to certain insidious forms of cruelty that lurk in his own daily habits it is perhaps premature, but

it is not altogether vain to hope. He will not hurriedly abandon his *pâté de foie gras*; he will not yield rashly to representations—the mere *tu quoque* of vivisectors!—as to the questionable humanity of certain of his sports; he will not turn vegetarian because the sight of a butcher's shop offends his sensibilities, and he has scruples about dining off what St. Francis of Assisi would call his “little brothers.” But short of all this, he has attained to a very respectable and long undreamed-of standpoint in the matter of kindness to dumb animals, and it will go hard if, in any effort to put down a cruel practice or to bring an offender in this kind to justice, he has not the full weight of public opinion on his side.

As soon, however, as we turn from the sixth and eighth commandments of the Decalogue, to the seventh, or from such laws as those of temperance and mercy to the law of chastity, the aspect of affairs is changed. That consentaneity of opinion which we have seen to prevail in the former cases has vanished like frost-pictures in a thaw; all is conflict,

uncertainty, discussion, and disagreement. To have other than lawful relations with the opposite sex, whether of a transient or permanent character, is wrong and is not wrong, is a sin and a venial pastime, a scandal and a joke, infamous and a "proof of manhood," ungodly and necessary. Pureness, there can be no doubt, is, as yet, without a generally accepted sanction.

It is true that for nineteen centuries the Christian religion has set forth to the world the gospel of purity. And not altogether in vain. Especially in the case of women, for whose moral and social elevation in every point Christianity was such a powerful instrument, has it left its mark in this respect. Such types of spotless and of redeemed womanhood as the Virgin Mother and the Magdalen have raised the standard of female virtue for all time, and the promptings of nature and experience have been reinforced by supernatural authority and glorified by the magic of the ideal.

But the teaching of Christianity on this

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head has not yet in any true or "saving" sense come home to the hearts of men. Even as it affects women, they have assimilated it in a curiously imperfect and illogical manner. They have hitherto entirely failed to perceive that from the moment when a woman's honour became her dearest possession, her chief jewel, the man by implication became a dastard, not who robbed her of it—that was from the first self-evident—but who so much as acquiesced in its "voluntary" forfeiture, or aided in obstructing its retrieval.

In their own case men have preached purity little, and have practised it less. They have had fits of asceticism from time to time, but their asceticism, at the best, has had no more to do with real obedience to the law of chastity than a fever has to do with health or any spasmodic exaggeration of a laudable impulse with a fixed and regular habit of mind. And, at the worst, to what depths of moral turpitude has not this fitful striving—

"To please God more,
Which meaneth otherwise than as God please,"

brought its disciples? A very limited acquaintance with the annals of monastic orders and of celibate priesthoods suffices to show how the attempt at a permanent and purely self-imposed crucifixion of one of the strongest and most sacred instincts of our nature has tended to warp that nature not only in this, but in every other direction. To the sin of profligacy it has added the sin of hypocrisy, to profanation of the temple of the body, prostitution of the intellect and pollution of the soul.

Mr. Matthew Arnold, in the preface to his "Last Essays on Church and Religion," speaks of Christianity having "set up as its two grand virtues—kindness and pureness, charity and chastity." To these two he reduces all the law and the prophets. "If any virtues could stand for the whole of Christianity, these might." And it seems to him that the claim of Christianity perpetually to rule and direct our lives is hereby established, since "all our passions may be run up into two elementary instincts corresponding with


these virtues," "the reproductive instinct and the instinct of self-preservation." The latter instinct, under the teaching of Jesus Christ and of our daily experience—Mr. Arnold's argument is that the two do not conflict—has become an intimate sense of our mutual interdependence. "If there is a lesson which in our day has come to force itself upon everybody, it is the lesson of the *solidarity*, as it is called by modern philosophers, of men." "It is coming to be even generally admitted" that "every man for himself" is an obsolete principle of action, that those who seek exclusively their own happiness are precisely those who miss real happiness altogether, and that he who loves his life, without reference to the lives of others, without regard to that "impersonal higher life," which the new commandment implies, "does really turn out to lose it."

There is no impugning the justice of Mr. Arnold's remarks on the first great Christian virtue of kindness. But when he turns to the second, pureness, and after speaking of

charity, begins to speak of chastity, his words grow yet more weighty and command the respectful attention of every thinking mind. Apart from the perennial admiration which all lovers of a lucid and incisive style must feel for the writings of one pre-eminent in the art of knowing clearly what he has to say and how best to say it, Mr. Arnold's thorough impartiality and complete freedom from theological bias specially entitle him to a hearing on a subject like the one under consideration. As he himself says, this virtue "as a mere *commandment* . . . cannot have the authority which it once had, for the notion of *commandments* in this sense is giving way." And, rightly or wrongly, the only moralists who in these days gain the ear of the majority of educated people, are those who base their appeals in favour of any virtue upon its "*natural truth*." Every word of the passage in question is of such deep import that it will be best to transcribe the whole of it.

"And the other great Christian virtue, pureness? Here the case is somewhat dif-

ferent. One hears doubts raised, nowadays, as to the natural truth of this virtue. While science has adopted, as a truth confirmed by experience, the Christian idea of charity, long supposed to conflict with experience, and has decked it out with the grand title of *human solidarity*, one may hear many doubts thrown in the name of science and reason, on the truth and validity of the Christian idea of pureness. As a mere *commandment* this virtue cannot have the authority which it once had, for the notion of *commandments* in this sense is giving way. And on its natural truth, when the thing comes to be tested by experience, doubts are thrown. Well, experience must decide. It is a question of fact. 'There is no honest woman who is not sick of her trade,' says La Rochefoucauld. 'I pass for having enjoyed life,' said Ninon, in old age, 'but if any one had told me beforehand what my life was going to be I would have hanged myself.' Who is right? On which side is *natural truth*? It will be admitted that



there can hardly be a more vital question for human society. And those who doubt on which side is natural truth, and who raise the question, will have to learn by experience. But finely touched souls have a presentiment of a thing's natural truth even though it be questioned, and long before the palpable proof by experience convinces all the world. They have it quite independently of their attitude towards traditional religion. 'May the idea of *pureness*, extending itself to the very morsel which I take into my mouth, grow ever clearer in me and clearer!' So prayed Goethe. And all such well-inspired souls will perceive the profound natural truth of the idea of pureness, and will be sure, therefore, that the more boldly it is challenged, the more sharply and signally will experience mark its truth. So that of the two great Christian virtues, kindness and pureness, the one has at this moment the most signal testimony from experience to its intrinsic truth and weight, and the other is expecting it."

It has, then, been shown that pureness is, as yet, without a universally recognized sanction.

This being so, the aspiration of all these "finely touched," these "well-inspired souls" who cherish the idea of it, having already perceived its "profound natural truth," must be to make straight a highway for it in the desert of the world.

How are they to set about it? In what way are they to carry their own conviction to the hearts of an untaught and indifferent generation, and help forward the reign of purity among men?

There are, of course, innumerable methods of advancing any cause which one has really at heart. The essential thing is to have it at heart. But there are two ways in which those who have the cause of pureness at heart will—so it seems to the present writer—find it especially profitable and hopeful to promote it. They are, first, to insist upon more openness and honesty in regard to the actual state of things; second, to endeavour to alter the existing

attitude of women towards the whole question.

Everybody knows that the first step towards healing a disease or reforming an abuse is to be alive to its existence. And it is not too much to say that the tacit ignoring of the subject under consideration in sermons and addresses, in books and periodicals of the higher class, and in the conversation of ordinarily refined society goes a great way towards aggravating the social canker which, whether in the form of professional vice or ordinary immorality, is all the time festering in our midst.¹ The innocent absolutely only know of it as they know of the North Pole, or the spots on the sun; and the initiated, from the habit of keeping their experience more or less to themselves, speedily learn to put, at any rate, the moral aspects of the question completely on one

¹ Since the above was written, very significant and very rapid changes have taken place in the attitude of press, pulpit, and general society with regard to the whole question.

side. From never hearing, or at most hearing vaguely and confusedly, in quarters where such doctrine should be proclaimed with no uncertain sound, that impurity is contemptible and wrong, they easily persuade themselves that it is venial, just as the people in Andersen's fairy tale, who had their own reasons for abstaining from comment on the absence of the emperor's clothes, probably ended by being convinced that he was dressed.

Not that we love refinement less, but that we love pureness more. It is a mistake to confound the precedence of the virtues. So far from improving an unsound condition of things, the mere throwing of a decent veil over it adds immeasurably to the evil. Shut off a fever-stricken patient from the air of heaven, and you multiply indefinitely the chances of infection ; seal up a shame-stricken practice from eyes and ears polite, allude to it but by innuendo and periphrase, shrink with a fastidious horror from all open reference to it in print or in discourse, and you are doing

your utmost to foster its growth, and spread it far and wide. As Mephistopheles has it—

“What chaste ears cannot bear the name of,
Chaste hearts can’t do without the shame of.”

We must be first pure, then refined. It is time to put on comely apparel when the body itself is clean.

That there is a literature and that there is a style of talk and deportment among us in which but little attempt is made at veiling anything, least of all vice, is unfortunately increasingly true. The model of the one is the French “realistic” novel ; that of the other, the Paris of the Second Empire. A frankness of this unblushing and cynical kind is scarcely calculated to further the object the advocates of plain-speaking in these matters have in view ; still, perhaps, even this is better than decking evil in insidious forms that show like heavenly innocence, and it may be that the very foulness of some recent developments of art, literature, and social iniquity will help to promote a reaction in favour of morality.

It is but fair to France to refer to the fact that a noble example of fearless and direct dealing with the crying sin of the age has been set by two French preachers, the one a Catholic, the other a Protestant — Père Hyacinthe and M. Monod. And to a certain extent the example has been followed here, some of our ablest divines having become more and more convinced of the paramount duty of influencing our young men for good in this particular. At the same time, the difficulties attending the frank public handling of a subject of this nature in church or lecture-room are undoubtedly great. Much may be done by the clergy in their capacity of private individuals, or by means of special services, and so forth ; but bold denunciation and stirring appeal from the pulpit to mixed congregations are not so easy, and when they are tried, are apt to give as much umbrage as they create astonishment.

Mrs. Ewing, in her fascinating story of "Jackanapes," quotes an anecdote of a "Father in God" who greatly disturbed a member of

•

his congregation by bidding the boys to be pure and the girls to be brave.

“ That the youths should have courage and the maidens purity, is what you would say, good father ? ”

But the preacher did not plead guilty to a slip of the tongue.


“ Nature has done that,” he answered, mildly. “ I meant what I said.”

And, difficult or not, surely the time has come that our “ Fathers in God ” should cease to pay tithe to their consciences of the mint and anise and cummin of exhortations which are easy to make, forgetting the fealty they owe to the weightier matters of the law. Offence may be given, but what true disciple of any good cause must not be prepared for that? Delicacy may be shocked, but is it not for the most part a spurious delicacy which is just as well out of the way? Or, if it is real, will it not easily be persuaded to abdicate for a little while in favour of purity?

And so in books and periodicals, and—if not in general—in intimate conversation, let

there be less blinking of facts which must often have a large place in the hidden consciousness of writer and speaker, yet which, for want of due ventilation, have never assumed their just proportions in his mind. If the thing is a problem, a *crux*, a dilemma beset with difficulties, let it at least be faced, be acknowledged, be grappled with, not left out of consideration merely because it is difficult, still less because a discreet silence regarding it, after all, ministers to "our pleasant vices." "If," in the words of a writer of whom I shall have more to say presently, referring to that outcast class which it has formed a noble part of her noble life-work to endeavour to reclaim, "If this class must exist . . . wherever, as in a civilized country, marriage is deferred, . . . let us at least be honest about it. . . . Let us have the parsonage on the one side of the church and the den on the other."

Into the details of the various objections which have been made, and which in the course of free discussion would arise with strength against the abolition of this class



and against the establishment of the reign of pureness in general, it is not within the scope of these imperfect and necessarily brief remarks to enter. It is sufficient to repeat in this place Mr. Arnold's weighty words: "It is possible to have a presentiment of a thing's natural truth, *even though it be questioned.*" "*Experience will decide.*" Nature, while we are arguing, is proceeding silently, but very surely, with the manufacture out of our pleasant vices of whips to scourge us, and, sooner or later, we come to realize this as individuals. Nor, it may be, will she take very many generations to prove convincingly to the mass the "*profound natural truth*" of the creed of the minority. We may legislate this way or that in the supposed interests of public health and public morals; deal with these matters upon their narrower immediate issues, or upon their broader permanent ones, consider might or right, expediency or justice, vested interests or friendless serfdom. A higher tribunal has in the meantime decreed monogamy for man, and it is sufficiently certain that if it be indeed

a choice of evils that lies before us, the systematic violation of the sacred ordinance of nature that a man shall (to alter slightly a line of the Laureate)—

“Love one only, and shall cleave to her,”

will prove the greater evil of the two.

And here a single word may be said in passing as to one of the most widely felt of what may be termed the moral, as distinguished from the physical objections to the observance of the law of purity. There is a tacit, but very general, feeling that a degree of licentiousness is essential to the manly character; that without a certain qualification in what is known as “wild oat sowing” a young man can scarcely be considered to hold full credentials for the society of his fellows and of older men. Very few really hold with Charles Kingsley that profligacy is “not a proof of manhood, but a cowardly and effeminate sin”—cowardly, because it either brings ruin upon others or else helps to sink them yet deeper in the

mire into which they have fallen ; effeminate, because, apart from its enervating effect upon body and mind, it springs from precisely that absence of self-control, that weak yielding to the impulse that is uppermost at the moment which has, rightly or wrongly, become associated with the feminine type of character. Yet for nearly two thousand years the ideal, the divinity of the civilized world has been One whose relations with women were, as we phrase it, strictly platonic. The simple grandeur, the nobleness, the manliness of the character of Jesus have never been called in question (I do not pause to except maudlin cavillers of the Théophile Gautier school abroad and at home), yet we have no hint of a closer relation with any woman than such a tender friendship as St. John describes in touching parenthesis : " Now Jesus loved Martha, and her sister, and Lazarus."

How will those who, whatever their conduct may be, profess and call themselves Christians, maintain that purity is inconsistent with virility ? The Founder of their religion

has given them the lie. Their refutation is in the energetic proselytizing, in the untiring philanthropy, in the heroic plainspeaking, in the manful martyrdom of Jesus.

To turn to the other means by which, as well as by an honest grappling with the question, it seems possible that public opinion may gradually be leavened in favour of moral purity.

It is the merest truism that the influence of women in the world is very large, so large that many of their best friends—perhaps slightly overlooking the more pressing and practical aspects of the “woman question”—have bid them be content to exercise this influence as they always have exercised it in the main—indirectly, and not to compete with men in seeking more immediate channels for it. By so doing, their advisers say, they merely risk the substance for the shadow, and sacrifice a real and undisputed empire over the lives and actions of men to place themselves in a useless, anomalous, and unpopular minority. And, though the argument may

not be very much to the purpose in the case of many of those to whom it is addressed, it undoubtedly contains a well-established truth. Even women who from choice or from circumstances remain unmarried, and who know nothing of the happy sovereignty of the wife and mother, nay, even women without fathers or brothers, would, for the most part, allow as much by virtue of the natural womanly instinct which teaches them their power over such men as they do come in contact with. But wives and mothers! Who shall set any bounds to their dominion? "Ask a man's wife," said a shrewd observer of mankind, "whether he is to be rich or respectable." "Give me a child for the first seven years of his life," said another, "and you may do what you will with him afterwards."

I may mention here, parenthetically, that, in speaking of the attitude of women towards this question, it is, of course, to the main body of right-thinking women that I refer, leaving out of consideration the melan-

choly fact that to a certain section of the sex it is a matter of as complete indifference as to the most unscrupulous of men. One of the most discouraging features of the prevailing corruption of morals, especially in the upper strata of society, is the growing relaxation not only of womanly decorum, but of womanly purity, and who can wonder if men make a mock at sin when they see those whom they are taught to regard as "the conscience of the world" sink to their own level, to worse than their own level, of moral callousness? It is, unfortunately, not in appearance alone that many a woman frequenting what are known as the "best houses" might be mistaken for a denizen of the *demi monde*; and so men mock—very naturally, being, most of them, not over pitiful of the infirmities of the weaker vessel, not over mindful of the impressionable and ductile nature which so readily adapts itself to its environment, which is so prone to believe what it is told and to follow where it is led. Happily, however, such *traitors* to the high tradition of their sex are,

as yet, the exception, not the rule. There are still vast numbers of pure women left to uphold the standard of moral integrity, and it is perhaps not wholly optimistic to regard the tone prevalent among certain women in "smart" society as but an eddy in the onward stream of progress towards better things.

However this may be, the really weighty point is the necessity of a radical change in the posture of mind of pure women themselves with regard to the spread of pureness. With certain noble exceptions, the utmost that has been done by them hitherto has been of a negative character, of so negative a character indeed that their behaviour has, instead of hindering, actually promoted the evil they hate, and their "fugitive and cloistered virtue" has been purchased at the expense, if not of their own misery, at any rate of others' ruin.

In a little pamphlet entitled, "Work in Brighton ; or, Woman's Mission to Women," to which Florence Nightingale has bid "God-speed," Miss Ellice Hopkins has ably and

fully set forth the state of things just described, and, with passionate earnestness, has pleaded with the women of England to suffer it to exist no longer. The "Mission" of which she treats is—I will not say the penitentiary, but the redemptive work among the lower class of fallen women in Brighton, set on foot some five and twenty years since by Mrs. Murray Vicars. This lady was the pioneer of an altogether new system of "rescue work"—the system which treats these hapless victims of the world's selfishness and callousness and paganism not as *penitents*, but as dear children whom love and trust and liberty—love, above all—will restore sometimes to absolute whiteness. It was she who was the first, or one of the first, to show to them that spirit of complete sympathy, that sense of unswerving justice which made the sweet Princess, whose too early loss left the world poorer, say within the walls of the first true *Home*,¹ "Tell them I am here as a woman among women."

¹ *Albion Hill Home, Brighton, founded by Mrs. Murray Vicars.*

Miss Hopkins's account of her work, eloquent, pathetic, graphic as it is, appealing with irresistible force to readers of all classes, and of every shade of religious "views," is eminently calculated to awaken her countrywomen from the lethargy into which the tradition of centuries, and the heathenism of caste, and the cruelty of custom have lulled them. Here is the right point of attack. No true woman but must be moved by pleadings like these, and by the tale of these brave, reasonable, and loving labours carried on by daylight, when facts are hardest to face, and no excitement on either side tempers the painfulness of the battle, the ugliness of the enemy. It is by such direct appeals to womanliness that the enthusiasm which is woman's great, good gift can best be stirred—in the first instance. Constitutional questions, class questions, questions of abstract justice and fair play appeal at present but to a minority—although happily to an ever-increasing minority—among women ; but compassion's sacred fire burns ever brightly in the

breast of every woman worthy of the name, and it is through her pity that we may count most safely on arousing woman's sense of right. And she must learn to pity these unhappy sisters of hers—unhappy almost never by their own fault (when one comes to look into the thing strictly)—to refuse to regard them as a separate caste, to deny that such a thing as an outcast class, cut off from human help, and without the pale of salvation earthly or heavenly, can exist in a civilized, to say nothing of a Christian, country.

It is not, of course, every woman who can start or join an "Association for the Care of Friendless Girls," and personally carry the saving influence of her own lovingness and her own purity into the haunts of vice. But every woman can exercise that personal influence on those about her wherein, as before said, her true supremacy lies. It is in this way that she can best help to uproot the social evil.

And, in order to exercise it to good purpose,

she must, first of all, modify very considerably her own habits of thought with regard to sins of uncleanness in every shape. She must, once for all, leave off that childish habit of ignoring a certain class of sins and dangers until, as far as she is concerned, and if she be spared a sudden and terrible awakening, they actually have no existence ; she must cease to confound two wholly distinct things, ignorance and innocence ; she must have the courage, without bating one jot of her humble and gentle womanhood, to look impurity in the face and say, "It shall not be." She need not fear contamination. Something she may have to suffer from opinion, but she will have high authorities to back her. Hear Chaucer, who knew what a woman should be—

"I say not she ne had knowing
What harm ywas, or ellès she
Had could no good—so thinketh me."

Hear the great poet of Puritanism :

"Evil into the mind of God or man
May come and go, so unapproved, and leave
No spot or blame behind."

Or, in the majestic prose from which we have already borrowed an expression: "I cannot praise a fugitive and cloistered virtue, unexercis'd and unbreath'd, that never sallies out and sees her adversary, but slinks out of the race, where that immortall garland is to be run for, not without dust and heat."

One can fancy many a noble-hearted woman rising up with the proud light of one to whom a long down-trodden truth has been revealed upon her brow, and saying: "This shall not be true of me. It shall no longer be said of me that I hug my own selfish and short-sighted purity, while thousands upon thousands of my sister-women are perishing for lack of a helping hand and a protesting voice. It shall no longer be true that the out-cast class to which they are relegated, branded like cattle for slaughter, is kept up '*quite as much by the feeling of pure men and women as by the impure.*' I will never allow, what I suppose I have tacitly allowed hitherto, that there can be two kinds of women in the *world*—one to be married, and cherished, and

honoured, and loved ; the other to be defiled and dishonoured, set apart, as a matter of course, for destruction, and condemned to the blackness of darkness for ever. No 'dust and heat' of the conflict shall withhold me from stretching out my hands to these sister-women of mine, in pity for their exceeding sinfulness, and in indignation at their unspeakable wrongs. I may suffer for thinking of them, for speaking of them, for knowing that they exist ; but I would rather forfeit opinion, friendship, love itself—I would rather be 'accursed from Christ' than that one of the most infamous of these should perish through my fault.

'Father ! I choose ! I will not take a heaven
Haunted by shrieks of far-off misery.'"

It is in her capacity of mother that the influence of such a woman would best make itself felt. It is to the future generation rather than to the present that the eyes of those that watch for the morning turn the most hopefully ; and, as in other things, so in

the heralding of that bright dawn of pureness—

“She who rocks the cradle rules the world.”

Such a woman would nurture very tenderly in her sons so high an ideal of womanhood that it would be no more possible for them to contribute to the degradation of a woman than to rob a till or to be accessory to a murder. Working upon their love for her, or, for the matter of that, their love for a sister, a cousin, any one in whom their ideal first embodies itself, she would so inspire them with a generous, chivalrous respect for the sex generally as to make them proof against temptation. True, she might take up different ground, and prove to them logically that even *selfishly* it is always their interest, beyond the possibility of question, to resist it. But probably she would leave logic to take care of itself, and look to love to help her. She would trust to the beauty of self-sacrifice; to the instinct which, in minds of any nobleness, already commends the weak to pity, and

should commend the erring to protection from themselves ; to the enthusiasm of womanhood which sees the mother, the sister, the bride, in every woman.

Then, socially, women who have come to see the magnitude of the issues at stake will do everything in their power to discourage the laxity of moral tone about them. Not merely the *fashionable* laxity—there is a good deal of fashion in these things—but the old, respectable, time-honoured laxity, which it seems as difficult to do away with, as it seemed once to abolish Protection or rotten boroughs. The laxity which tolerates and even admires in a humorous, *bon garçon* way, a moderate degree of immorality. The laxity which has two moral standards, one for the man, the other for the woman. The laxity which draws a further distinction between a man's public and private character, resenting a too minute investigation of the latter—as though in the days we live in there were such a thing as *private* character ; as though in any days men's *private* ill-doing were not as the hidden leaven,

assailing at a million unseen points the common weal, and gradually, but surely, tainting the whole lump. The laxity which acquiesces in the systematized desecration of womanhood, with all its ghastly concomitants, a few only of which are the decoying, the imprisoning, the trafficking in, and the murder, moral and physical, of women.

In the case of their own sex they will promote as far as possible a return to all that was best in "old-fashioned" ladyhood. They will point out that a girl may love all sorts of open-air exercise, and even sport, without being slangy; that she may cultivate her intelligence and indulge her nobler inclinations without being "strong-minded;" that she may enjoy herself in society, ay, even in the much abused society of the present day, without being fast. They will wage a perpetual, if good-humoured, war with the lust of dress; they will not yield one iota to the practice of "doing up;" they will, among other things, confine the wearing of false hair, and even the *manipulation* of natural hair, within the nar-

rowest limits consistent with grace and comeliness. And if they have daughters whom they have been so happy as to nurture thus they will see that they do not give them in marriage to men unworthy of them. Overstocked though the marriage-market may be, they still will withdraw their wares from it rather than part with them to those who would profane them. They will not be content with a mere understanding that aspirants will *ranger*—for life or for six months, as the case may be. They will let it be known that they exact more ; that they expect from them, and by degrees from society, a change not merely of *habits*, but of *principles*, a reform more nearly approaching to that of the woman-libertine whose tears fell like rain upon her Restorer's feet.

And all this will be done, as all good work is done, by the strength of gentleness, the insensible sapping of tact, the irresistible magnetism of love. There will be a curbing of the over-strong emotion which defeats itself, a chastening of too precipitate indignation, which should always be directed to

fallacies—never to the men who hold them ; a determined strangling of the many petty and personal elements in every crusade, a great tenderness for the infirmity of prejudice, a great patience under the slowness with which every mighty truth asserts itself.

It is time to bring to a close a very brief and inadequate attempt to handle a theme as intricate and inexhaustible as it is momentous.

“ A demain, lorsque le soleil paraîtra ! ”

Charity has received its sanction. So, *à fortiori*, will Chastity.

“ Of the two great Christian virtues, kindness and pureness, the one has at this moment the most signal testimony from experience to its intrinsic truth and weight, and *the other is expecting it.* ”

“ PUISSANCE OBLIGE.”

“ Quand on a toute liberté, il sied de garder toute mesure.”—VICTOR HUGO.

THIS is the motto of the new chivalry. The old “*Noblesse oblige*” has had its day, and has lost its spell. It laid a magnificent obligation upon men, but for the most part its trumpet-call has been disallowed, and when it has not been disallowed it has been misunderstood. Mere nobility of birth no longer demands, or vainly demands, that its possessor shall be in the van of the battle of progress, and shall bring the whole weight of his own *prestige* and of his forefathers’ merits to bear on the conflict with the powers of darkness. The “chivalrous” man nowadays is the man who is not grossly

selfish in his relations with women, who does not care to be seated in public places where ladies are standing, and who has a pretty knack of picking up fans and handing cups of tea. And yet chivalry, no longer the monopoly of the "*noblesse*," and known in general society only as such an attenuated survival, is not really extinct among us. It is a principle at least as deeply embedded in human nature as any other, and it is one which is destined to be enormously developed if the march of humanity is to be onward and upward. Its forms may vary. It may be associated in one age with tilts and tourneys and sonnets to a lady's eyebrow, in another with tricks of manner and the more refined type of gallantry. But such manifestations are

"but broken lights of thee."

Chivalry, in its essence, is greater than these. It is, and it will be seen to be, more and more, the eternal responsibility of the strong towards the weak; it is force withheld,

prerogative renounced, passion subordinated to pity. It is not the man alone who is privileged to exercise it towards the woman. The woman knows something of its rapture every time that she holds a child in her arms, every time that a dependent being teaches her solemn lessons of purity and single-heartedness, and by its very nature as a sacred trust, claims her reverence as well as her tenderness. The child, in his turn, learns or should learn in good time the lessons of chivalry in his relations with the lower animals. In babyhood he has a large power for good or evil over the lives of his pups and his kittens, and may become either the dreaded tyrant or the revered constitutional ruler of a menagerie of pets.

And generally to all inferiors, to all subordinates, this gracious principle of respect for the weaker vessel should obtain. Change but a word in the old apothegm—intrinsically one of the grandest which it ever entered into the heart of man to conceive—

"Maxima reverentia pueris debetur."

Read for *pueris—debilibus*, and you have the Alpha of the new chivalry whose Omega is "*Puissance Oblige*."

There exists in our community a class of persons to whom its teaching has as yet been very imperfectly applied—why, it would be hard to say, for whatever claims weakness has upon strength, they possess in a superlative degree. Mr. Lecky, in a flourish of sublime nonsense, has dubbed them "the priestesses of humanity," bearing, since some one must bear it, the sin of the world. And who are these majestic priestesses? They are not women. They are children, women-children, at least when they first assume their sacred functions. They are young girls in their teens, that is, of the age when our daughters and sisters have hardly got into "long dresses," when they are still at school, or in the schoolroom, when they prefer a circus or a pantomime—the babies!—to a party "where you have to be so proper, you know." Of such are the "priestesses of humanity."

With this difference. That they have never had a father to romp with them, or a brother to protect them from a whisper of insult. That from the first, life has meant to them hard work, privation, severity, servitude. That for many of them—"not so much born as damned into the world"—it has meant education in evil and encouragement, nay, compulsion to vice. That the happiest of them have not been sheltered from temptation; that the wisest of them are very ignorant and childish; that the richest of them are very poor.

And what have we done for our women-children, our little priestesses, *some* man's daughters, *some* man's sisters—or who might be a man's sisters, if they are not? What have we done for them?

There have been knights-errant, surely, who have espoused their cause! There have been Sir Galahads, many and strong, who have ridden forth in their quarrel, who have toiled day and night to reinstate them in their rights, their heritage of an honest stainless,

if toiling, humble womanhood ! They have had eloquent advocates whose hearts have been wrung for their youth, and their poverty, and their sex, and their sufferings ; men who would die a thousand deaths rather than add to their degradation, or leave them in the slough where their hard fate has cast them !

Surely it has been so—and yet—this is what we have done for the women-children, who might have been our own.

We have taught them that a first downward step is irretrievable, and stamps upon them a brand which nothing can efface. We have goaded them on to fresh evil with all the force of cruel contempt or frigid indifference. We have herded them together in one outcast class, without distinction of character or experience in sin. We have hardened them, often in periods incredibly short, unsexed them, made of them drunkards, blasphemers, tempters, fiends in human form. *We* have done this.

Even when we have had too much respect for womanhood and for ourselves, to heap

fresh ignominy upon them, we have been responsible for their blood, inasmuch as we have stood aloof, and have deemed with a cynical apathy, or with the fastidious shrinking of a mistaken refinement, that their fate did not concern us.

"Upon the soul of every individual amongst us did a portion of guilt rest, as long as the slave trade remained legal," said Coleridge, and as long as society's laws, whether sanctioned by Act of Parliament or no, ordain a yearly holocaust of thousands of its weakest members, so long will their blood be upon the head of every responsible member of society.¹

Yet there is a change coming. There is on the horizon a cloud scarcely bigger than a man's hand, which is destined to grow and grow till it overspreads the sky. I allude to the awakening of women to their responsi-

¹ For a calm, dispassionate, yet profoundly touching, statement of the case of the "priestesses of humanity" *v.* "society," see Chapters VI. and VII.—especially Chapter VII.—of Sir Arthur Helps' "Companions of my Solitude."

bilities towards their young sisters. The truths that are dawning with irresistible but gradual force upon the reasoning minds of men, have laid hold with a sudden fiery grip of the impassioned spirits of women, and caused the scales of age-long custom, the "stiffening crust" of tradition, to fall from their eyes. They are going forth to raise the newly-fallen, to melt the hardened with love, to wipe out a past of sickening horror in a future of hope and calm ; they are, moreover, working socially and politically for justice and for purity, for the extension in fact, not in name, of the kingdom of Christ.

Shall these women work and suffer alone ? Shall not more helpers than have yet supported them, come to their aid ? They alone can bear the brunt of the conflict. They alone, armed with a supernatural strength, with a truly miraculous heroism, can reach directly the forlorn scape-goat without the camp, and bring it back again. But men can prevent the sacrificing of fresh souls. They can lessen year by year the number of victims

for the national *auto-da-fe*, they can influence each other and the tone of society generally, they can promote in a thousand ways the "stream of tendency" which makes for real and practical, instead of nominal and theoretic, social purity.

Does any need strengthening himself in a virtuous life, before he can feel himself worthy to join the ranks of the new chivalry? Let him remember the derivation of that word *virtue*, *virtus*, and if he can, get rid of certain false ideas which have become associated with it in its sense of purity. In that sense it is too often looked upon as an insipid, namby-pamby sort of affair intended chiefly for four classes of the community, viz., muffs, prigs, parsons, and women.

We have poets maundering about "The lilies and languors of virtue," and "the roses and raptures of vice," forgetting that *virtue* in all its senses is simply *manhood*, *manliness*—a thing Englishmen, at any rate, are not in the habit of connecting with "lilies and languors," but rather with the "roses and

raptures" of energy and achievement, of self-immolation and self-control.

See what our Laureate thinks about the "lilies and languors of virtue," in his "Sir Galahad"—

“ My good blade carves the casques of men,
My tough lance thrusteth sure,
My strength is as the strength of ten,”

why ?—

“ *Because my heart is pure.*”

No ; when a woman has “lost her virtue” she has not more surely forfeited her womanliness than a man, when he has lost *his* virtue, has forfeited his manhood, and sunk in the scale of creation.

In this matter, as in most human concerns, “*L’union fait la force*” holds good, and the principle of association, of strengthening the weak hands and the feeble knees by mutual co-operation, sympathy, and support, should step in. Various efforts in this direction have already been made by the minority, the growing minority, who have the cause of

purity at heart. Among them is a society some few years old, known as the "Social Purity Alliance," and now consisting of about 1,100 members, which would seem to deserve the allegiance of a far greater number.¹ Upon its lists are or have been names representative of widely varying opinions, such names, *e.g.*, as those of the late Bishop of Argyll and Miss Martineau, Dr. Gott of Leeds and Mr. Kegan Paul. The Alliance lays its members under no special obligations or restrictions of any kind—even subscription being entirely voluntary. It simply demands adhesion to the principle "that purity of life is as binding upon men as upon women, and is a sacred, universal obligation," and the working out of the principle it leaves to individual character and individual opportunities. It seeks to further its work :

- i. By constantly enlisting fresh members.
- ii. By circulating its publications.
- iii. By establishing local branches.

¹ The Alliance now, 1885, numbers some 3,000 adherents.

- iv. By corresponding members.
- v. By lectures, conferences, and drawing-room meetings.
- vi. By articles and letters in the newspaper press.
- vii. By advertisements.
- viii. By book-selling agents.
- ix. By the co-operation of the clergy, professors at the Universities, and all religious and other teachers.
- x. Specially by the individual influence which young men and others, earnest and enthusiastic for purity in men and justice to women, may continuously exert among their associates.

Its lectures bear upon such subjects as the "Historic Aspects of the Family," the "Relation of Classes to each other as Affecting Social Purity," "Social Dangers and Duties," the "Objects of the Social Purity Alliance."^{*}

"Change in the conditions of life," says a

^{*} Full information respecting the history, character, and aims of the Social Purity Alliance may be had from the Hon. Secretary, the Rev. R. A. Bullen, B.A., 2, Barton Street, Westminster. The Alliance can claim the honourable distinction of being the pioneer of similar movements, such as the Moral Reform Union, the White Cross Army, the Church of England Purity Society, etc. It was founded in 1873, some years before the first of the many kindred societies now existing.

recent writer, "may be wrought by united effort, it cannot be attained by isolated effort. When we consider the innumerable objects for which strength is gained by association, and that this rational principle is constantly extending its operations in the present age, it is evident that any strong, leading principle, capable of enlisting devotion and steady enthusiasm, affords sound basis for combination and organization. Such a leading principle is found in the clear conviction of the nobility of the human principle of sex ; the binding obligation of one moral law for all, and the regenerating power of the law upon the human race."

And, indeed, the more one looks at this particular "leading principle," the more one reads about it, thinks of it, speaks of it, in fitting time and place, without prudery or timidity, without selfishness or prejudice, the more it appeals to one as *the* very weightiest and grandest cause that ever "enlisted devotion and steady—not fitful—enthusiasm," as the very worthiest object for determined

"combination and organization" that life presents. It is of course impossible in the course of a few brief and meagre remarks like the present, to even distantly hint at the magnitude and multitude of the issues at stake in this new crusade. But once the question opened with candour and earnestness, they will occur, as it were, of their own accord, carrying with them irresistible conviction.

"I have taken up this question," said one, who was not an easy prey to enthusiasm in its worn-out sense of futile, fanatic zeal, "because, of the many questions that have come before me in life, it is the only one I could not see two sides to."

It is useless and absurd to say that no heroism will be needed in the conflict. Clear as day though the truth may be to seeing eyes, it will have to be wrestled for as the truth always has been wrestled for since time began, and its champions will have to endure the usual "fightings without and fears within," hatred, opposition, scepticism, and contumely.

Especially in the false moral standard prevailing in the upper strata of society will they encounter a most formidable obstacle. Few of us, even in these democratic days, are wholly proof against fallacies that obtain in high places, that are embodied in our laws and exemplified in the private life of "the governing classes."

No. The struggle will be a tough one—no petty jousting—but a matter of life and death—a business for knights-errant who mean business and

"Still to be strenuous for the bright reward."

On the cover of one of the publications of the Social Purity Alliance, a paper read before the London Dialectical Society by the Secretary, the Rev. R. A. Bullen, stand the closing words of one of the great poems of the world, Goethe's *Faust*. Whether, as a "Saturday" reviewer of a recent translation, suggests, "the wonderful last scene in heaven" "presents the best side of mediæval and catholic exaltation" only, or something of

far more human and permanent significance, there is at any rate eternal truth in these closing lines—

“Das Ewig-Weibliche
Zieht uns hinan”—

Bayard Taylor renders them—

“The Woman-Soul leadeth us
Upward and on.”

Not that we are to get a woman to smuggle us into heaven when we are sick of our follies and sins ; not that we are to do our religion and morality by deputy, admiring women's purity and goodness with sentimental wistfulness, and contenting ourselves, for our own part, with “half the virtues ;” but that we are to defer to the weaker, to surrender to the needy and the oppressed, to do battle for the poor, to aspire with the pure in heart, to remember : “*Puissance oblige.*”

THE NEW GODIVA.



A DIALOGUE.

SCENE.—*A Smoking-room, Tyburnia.*

THE INTERLOCUTORS ARE TWO BROTHERS, VICTOR
AND CECIL.

“ ‘ You would not let your little finger ache
For such as *these* ? ’ ‘ But I would die,’ she said.”
GODIVA.

VICTOR. The last of them gone, thank
Heaven ! Now, at last, we shall get a
a couple of hours alone together. I seem
scarcely to have seen you since you came
home. By the way, let me congratulate you
on the figure you make in society after
ten years in Queensland. Our friends to-

night, I could see, imagined that they had been asked to meet a kind of savage, a sort of wild-man-of-the-woods, and were surprised, and a little disappointed, to find a cultivated English gentleman, well up in the politics, literature, and even small-talk of the day, and guiltless of eating with his knife or helping himself with his fingers.

CECIL. You flatter me. More than once this evening I felt painfully conscious of my social inexperience. When your friend Aimée, for instance, sounded me upon women's suffrage, and eyed me with good-humoured contempt as I feebly expounded my retrograde views on that subject, I devoutly wished myself back in the Bush.

VICTOR. I deny the contempt. Aimée is incapable of scorn, except for what is base. She is the greatest friend my wife has——

CECIL. Indeed! I should have thought her too strong-minded for the gentle Mary. You smile——

VICTOR. At the notion of anything *strong-minded*, in the vulgar sense of the term, in

one of the most refined, tender, and lovable of women. Oh, prejudice! what a miracle-worker art thou! You meet a charming, sympathetic, feminine creature like Aimée, and you are prepared to fall at her feet. You hear that she wants the franchise, and instantly, without any change in her demeanour, you dub her *strong-minded*, a compound of Medusa and Mrs. Jellyby, an unsexed, aggressive, officious, dangerous being, to whom all rational persons would give a wide berth!

CECIL. Aimée, at any rate, is fortunate in her champion! But, seriously, granting the prejudice, and attributing it, if you like, to a very natural cause, my ten years' exile from the haunts of civilization and progress, I confess that nothing has amazed me more in my solitude than certain recent developments of this woman question. Reading, of course, can never take the place of personal intercourse with one's fellows, to which, for all except scholars proper, it is at best an adjunct, and it is very possible that my mind has been warped by the solitary perusal of

what Aimée would call reactionary journalism and periodical literature. But failing such personal intercourse, I have read all the more diligently, and, perhaps, I may say, honestly, and the result is a feeling of some bewilderment at what would appear to be some very curious, if not threatening, social phenomena. Even the strides of science, inconceivably marvellous though these are, seem to me to be less portentous than the moral revolution which is rapidly modifying and displacing the sex.

VICTOR. Perhaps you would mention some of the more alarming of these phenomena, some of the graver symptoms of the malady?

CECIL. You are laughing at me. You know better than I do what they are. In the first place, you have ladies' high schools and colleges—women receiving men's education and men's degrees. Then you have lady doctors—women familiarized with dissecting-rooms—vivisecting-rooms too, if our medical faculty is in the right. Then you have lady members of school-boards and boards of guar-

dians ; ladies wielding the municipal franchise ; ladies assembling in monster demonstrations to clamour for the parliamentary franchise. Literature, of course, has been their special field for long ; but, so far as I know, it is only of late years that they have joined the ranks of atheists and agnostics, and that if you happen upon a magazine article of more than common rancour against existing creeds, you are safe in taking for granted that it was written by a woman. Last, but not least, you have women initiating and banding together to promote an agitation of too unsavoury and repulsive a character even to name. How it has come to pass that any pure-minded woman could mix herself up in the remotest degree in so contaminating a matter, I am, for my own part, totally at a loss to conceive. It is, of course, impossible not to credit the greater part of the large number of women who seem to be concerned in the movement with honest, if mistaken and pernicious motives. I can only say that, personally, I find it difficult to reconcile the

notion of anything honourable or worthy with a "mission" of that sort. To take the most charitable view of the thing, I do not suppose that misguided philanthropy, ignorant, hysterical feminine enthusiasm, ever culminated in so painful and revolting a monstrosity as this last craze of the "shrieking sisterhood"—

VICTOR. That will do. Your outburst is natural enough, and you will easily believe that it is not the first philippic of the kind I have listened to. But before you go any further, I think it is only fair to mention that the ranks of the "shrieking sisterhood" have been swelled by a recent convert in the person of—your sister-in-law, my wife!

CECIL. Gracious powers!

VICTOR. Do not look so distressed. I expected all this, and only said nothing of the matter in writing because I felt a personal explanation would be easier.

CECIL. But you have allowed it? you countenance it?

VICTOR. Pardon me. There is no question of *allowing* between my wife and myself.

That is the relation between master and slave ; or, if you will, between parent and child, not between two grown human beings endowed with reason. I admire Mary's "enthusiasm" and I share it, for reasons which I shall presently explain.

CECIL. Good heavens ! The gentle Mary ! The sweetest, tenderest, merriest little girl of eighteen, as I recollect her ! And so beautiful now, so young, so fair, a man

"Would not beteem the winds of heaven
Visit her face too roughly !"

If these things must be—and, from your espousal of the cause, I am willing to believe there is more in it than I know—surely they should be left to older women, to matrons and spinsters who are tired of Dorcas meetings and district-visiting. That they should take to political agitation—and such political agitation is bad enough. But a woman like Mary ! born to enchant society ! a woman you can hardly endure to see cross the muddy street !

VICTOR. I can best answer you by repeating a short conversation I had with her a few days ago. I found her one evening sitting alone before her glass—beautiful enough in the bright light—the face whiter than usual from a vigil that had not been tearless ; the blue eyes still large with tears, yet, oddly enough, a smile about the mouth. She saw me start, and turned to me. “I was thinking,” she said, “how glad I am that I have kept my good looks. I have found out the use of being pretty now. It is a proof that you are in earnest.” “How so?” I asked. “It is not hard,” she said, “to make yourself unpopular, when you have few popular gifts to sacrifice, when you are wrecked by time, and, if not soured, saddened—as I suppose all thinking beings must be—by age. But to embrace an unpopular cause when you have, in a sense, the world at your feet ; to lay yourself open to misconception and calumny and scorn, and worse” (here she shuddered), “when you might surround yourself with nothing but what is flattering and pleasant—

this, I think, is to show that you are disinterested and sincere."

CECIL. It would be difficult, certainly, to look into Mary's eyes and imagine her to be anything else. But go on. Did she say anything more?

VICTOR. She did. After thinking for a few minutes very gravely, she began to smile again in that curious, tearful manner. "And in another way," she said, "I have found it of use to be tolerably fresh and pleasant looking. It puts me quicker *en rapport* with my girls. It shows them that at least I have known what it is to be young and foolish. They write to me about my 'dear face,' my 'bright face,' my 'happy smile.' All that is useful, and not to be despised. I notice there are so many women who take up 'work' of various kinds from motives which are not the highest. They want occupation; they are tired of home restraints; they have had disappointments, and '*épousent Dieu, parce qu'elles n'ont pu épouser leur cousin.*' Now, in my case, my children can never think I go to them because I have nothing else to do." ■

CECIL. Then Mary has some class of girls ?

VICTOR. Not exactly. Mary is a believer in individual treatment, and never has more than one with her at a time, if she can help it. She says she gets at them better in one *tête-à-tête* than she would do in twenty classes. Besides, classes are not exactly compatible with rescue work.

CECIL. Rescue-work ! Do I understand you that Mary visits Refuges and Penitentiaries ?

VICTOR. I should have said with the branch of rescue-work which she has taken up. No ; she has chosen a field which she deems of more importance, because it is the most difficult of all, and the workers in it are scarce, as yet. She and her friend Aimée visit the houses of ill-fame in the daytime, try to reach the inmates separately, and when they have got them out, which they accomplish mainly by winning their affections, deal with each case singly, as the special circumstances require.

CECIL. I am bewildered ! To hear you

talk so calmly of such horrors ! As if it were a matter of course that one's wife should be exposed to such contamination, should go freely into those dens of iniquity, and associate on equal terms with the wretched women whose very existence it is a shame she should know of !

VICTOR. I am not only not surprised at your bewilderment, but I can sympathize with you in it. It is not till a man has given long, patient, unprejudiced, and unselfish thought to this matter, that any other attitude of mind can be expected of him. We are all brought up, or have been until quite latterly, men and women alike, to ignore, as far as it can be ignored, that outward and visible sign of an inbred taint and of widespread corruption known as the "social evil." What we have heard of it in our youth, we have heard illicitly and by stealth ; any practical knowledge we may have of it in later years, we acquire also illicitly and by stealth, lest our mothers and sisters, lest any pure-minded woman, or, for the matter of that, high-minded man, hear of our wild-oat-sowing ; or, if we

are of a different calibre, and unfortunately brought, officially or otherwise, into contact with the abominable thing, we get through our distasteful duty as rapidly as we may, thinking nothing of the tremendous issues, national and domestic, that are involved, but only how we may pass on, with all expedient haste, to less unsavoury business.

CECIL. I confess I have not been in the habit of regarding this matter from a "national" point of view. What do you mean, now, by tremendous national issues?

VICTOR. I could talk to you on that chapter till morning. But I prefer to sum up in words not my own the substance of what I should say. I can put my finger on the passage—here—in my common-place book. It is from the first volume of Froude's "Early Life of Carlyle:" "*He saw that now, as much as ever, the fate of nations depended, not on their material development, but, as had been said in the Bible, and among all serious peoples, on the moral virtues, courage, veracity, PURITY, justice, and good sense. Nations where these*

were honoured, prospered and became strong. Nations which professed well with their lips, while their hearts were set on wealth and pleasure, were overtaken as truly in modern Europe as in ancient Palestine by the judgment of God."

CECIL. I suppose there is no controverting the argument contained in that very eloquent passage. But I am afraid I am a dense, matter-of-fact person, not very susceptible to flights of rhetoric, and own I should prefer some less vague and general proof of your assertion.

VICTOR. As I said before, it would take me all night to prove it categorically. For the rest, I am not a great believer in statistics. As George Eliot says, "the driest argument has its hallucinations," and I maintain that men may dream in statistics as well as in demonstrations, and cut out for themselves illusory worlds in the shape of returns, as well as axioms, "with a final exclusion of fact signed Q.E.D." But if you are a stickler for figures, I will mention one or two. They will, I think, content you. The number of

victims—I will call them by no harsher name, lest I come short of the truth—the number of victims to the selfishness of men, the indifference of women, and the ignorance and callousness of society generally, in London alone has been computed at 80,000. Suppose it is only half as many. Imagine *forty thousand* women living in a state of the profoundest moral and physical degradation, in a servitude more abject than the most abject form of slavery recorded in history, in a defilement as complete as anything we have shuddered at in the annals of ancient Rome or modern Paris! The fact requires no comment. It is not an agreeable fact; it is not a cheerful fact. But I think it cannot be gainsaid that it is an important fact, and that it behoves us as citizens—I will not say as humane and rational beings—to look it in the face. My common-place book, which, with your leave, will remain open while we are upon this subject, furnishes plenty of evidence *not* of a “vague and general” character, if more be desired. Here is a specimen.

"I consider," says a writer who has earned the right to be heard on this question, "the saddest and deepest of our social evils, the degradation of women, as pre-eminently a sin *against the community*, feeding the crime and disease of the country to a degree that few altogether realize. Out of 18,700 summary female convictions in Ireland, 11,463, or 61·3 per cent. were prostitutes. The statistics of disease would show more terrible results still, could they be obtained." Have you had enough? Or will you hear another *fact*? Our slave-population of degraded girls is of a transitory, not of a permanent character. About two-fifths of them marry. What of their subsequent history? What of their offspring? What of a society recruited from such elements, of a lower class so mothered? But, as I said, to my own mind no figures are needed to expose the horrors of this national sore we hide indeed, but secretly nourish—I had almost said cherish—at any rate, accept as a disposition of things that always must be, as it always has been. For one whose

eyes are opened, the proofs of the injury it occasions to the community, the deep-seated evil of which it is at the same time cause and effect, are not far to seek. They are in every newspaper he takes up, every book he reads, every chance conversation he hears.

CECIL. May I interrupt you to ask a question in passing? I do not understand why you insist on calling these wretched women *victims* and *slaves*. Surely they are free agents like the rest of us, and have themselves to thank for the plight they are reduced to.

VICTOR. *Are* women free agents? Do we consider our own women—the women of our own class—free agents? Even when we have braced and strengthened them with all that care and culture can do for them; when, amid the amenities of home life, we have taught them German and music, possibly Greek and mathematics; do we consider them, so trained and panoplied, fit to be launched upon the world alone at fifteen or sixteen? Do we not look upon them as quasi-children while they are in their teens—

indeed, in many cases, till they marry, at whatever age? Do we not foster them, shelter them, shield them, demur to their going abroad unchaperoned—continue, in short, to father them? Yet these girls who make our streets unholy and our nights hideous—you persist in calling them *women*! What wondrous hallucination is this? Is it a far-off memory of the “strange woman” of Proverbs? And do you seriously believe that three thousand years have wrought no change in this thing—that the Judæa of Solomon’s time was in all respects as the London of our own, that “the profligate married woman of mature years, described in those verses, bore the smallest relation to the wretched, hungry, and ignorant children who infest our streets?” Again, it is scientific fact that a rapid physiological development is frequently accompanied by a sluggish mental one. The *woman* of sixteen is an infant in judgment, in reflection, in self-control—

CECIL. But not always in experience.

VICTOR. Almost always in experience that

is calculated to do her any good. Of what use is it to her to *know* that infamy exists years before her sister of the upper classes suspects it? How does she acquire the knowledge? From the lips of the only teacher that ever kept man or woman steadfast in innocence of life—the lips of love? Or from her low surroundings, her unscrupulous companions, her coarse, unlovely mode of life, and those harsh threats which sow the seeds of every evil they are intended to avert?

CECIL. Is it then matter of fact that these girls are for the most part very young in years?

VICTOR. It appears from the statistics of Rescue Societies that the greater number are led astray before they are eighteen. I will not touch upon the appalling fact of the increasing desecration of mere children.¹ You

¹ The extent to which this devilish form of crime has latterly prevailed in our midst was probably unknown to the most experienced, until the heroic Editor of *The Pall Mall Gazette* let in a flood of light upon the secret wickedness of wealthy London. I suppose that in all the annals of human guilt, a sadder document was never penned than the letter to him in which "A Man of the World" describes the rise and

know that up to thirteen the law affords them a certain protection. After that we have ordained that these infants in mind and will, these unstable ones, these orphaned ones—for orphaned they usually are of all true succour—shall be *free agents*. If they had so much good fortune as to possess material wealth, we should guard that for them till they were twenty-one. No plea of “consent” would avail one who should seek to defraud them of their gold. But, if in a moment of giddiness and blindness—ah me! of hunger and of anguish—they barter away the one priceless possession that they have, what is that to us? She is of age, ask her, she shall speak for herself. She is—thirteen! Good God! It makes the blood curdle. Upon the condition of public opinion which renders such a state of the law tolerable for

progress among certain leading sections of society of this particular enormity. When one reflects upon its unspeakable cruelty, treachery, cowardice, and foulness, it is difficult not to believe that some tremendous upheaval will shake to its foundations the *régime* under which such deeds have been done with impunity.

another hour, I will not trust myself to enlarge.¹ I will merely turn again to the writer whose impassioned words I have quoted more than once. "As long as ruined girls are talked of as a necessity of a complex civilization, which delays early marriage ; as long as a high price is forthcoming for the commodity ; as long as Englishmen remain on a level with the Zulu chieftain who, when the English Government sent him a present of waggons and wheelbarrows, exclaimed, in fine scorn, ' What's the use of those things for bearing our burthens whilst we have plenty of women ? ' as long as the British Zulu says complacently, ' What is the use of our bearing that burthen of self-control which civilized life throws upon us, whilst we have plenty of women to crush and degrade ? ' so long the demand will create the supply."

CECIL. Stop a moment. You are going

¹ Thanks to the pressure put upon public opinion by the action of *The Pall Mall Gazette*, the Criminal Law Amendment Bill, raising the age of consent to sixteen, was passed last session, immediately after the appearance of the first edition of this work.

too fast. Your zeal, which I will admit to be righteous, seems to me to be slightly outrunning your discretion. I do not believe that the majority of men reason in that manner.

VICTOR. Oh, for that matter, neither do I. I am speaking of their practical, not of their ostensible reasoning. It matters very little to you how men *talk*, if once you have the unlucky knack of examining the logic of their actions.

CECIL. Then you would give men in general credit for being so black-hearted ?

VICTOR. Heaven forbid. My quarrel is with principles, not with individuals. They are the victims of a false public opinion, that is all. For the most part they have no conception themselves where that same unconscious logic of theirs really lands them. I think well enough of my species to believe that when any average man does know it, does learn, by careful investigation, observation, and reflection, the true position in which he is placed by the anomalies of our present social code, he repudiates that code as he

repudiates cowardice and baseness, and everything that dishonours, deforms, and degrades his manhood. For the rest, if I exaggerate in discussing this question, you must condone it on the score of the centuries of numbness, of deadness, that have surrounded the aspect of it upon which we are just now dwelling. We have hitherto exaggerated our blame of the weak woman. We may be pardoned for temporarily exaggerating our blame of the strong man. Let our endeavour be to fix our eyes neither upon man nor woman, but upon *truth* only, and the balance may be trusted to redress itself of its own accord. Meanwhile, there are heroic spirits who are not afraid of exaggerating their own share of responsibility in this matter. There is a young man—a kind of Galahad—brave, as only the very pure can be—a true knight of modern times—who is giving his life to the cause. He once went up to a group of outcasts, and told them from his heart, with all the pitying respect and courtesy due to their spoiled womanhood, that when he thought of how men had

wronged them, he was ashamed to look them in the face—he was ashamed to be a man.


CECIL. You speak as though none of them had ever tempted men—young men especially—to evil.

VICTOR. I never hear that argument without thinking of that manly excuse of Adam's: "The woman whom Thou gavest to be with me, she gave me of the tree, and I did eat." But granting, as you know that I do abundantly grant, that most men are simply without the means of knowing their real duty in relation to women; that we wrong them only less cruelly than we wrong their temptresses, that we educate them falsely at home, at school, and in the world—are we, on that account, to keep up our pariah-system with regard to the weaker class of transgressors only? How did they become such? From choice? I answer most deliberately—No. In Paris, the "brothel of Europe," as it has been called with painful fitness, it has been computed that only about five per cent. of these poor souls voluntarily

choose and like their life. They are in prison and cannot come forth. The first false step has placed them under the social ban. Henceforth retrieval is made well-nigh impossible. They must "tempt" or starve. They are the scorn of women, the slaves of men. The leaden pall of age-long custom, of tradition, of conventionality, has descended upon them, as it were, in an instant, and effectually shut off from them all hope of rising into a purer air. Last of all, the State steps in to recognize their "trade" and fit them for it, to carefully exclude them from every constitutional, as they are already excluded from every social, privilege, to brand them like cattle, and set them apart for uses less noble than those to which we devote the beasts of the field.

CECIL. But are we to condone impurity in a woman? Is there not something to be said for the "age-long custom" which ostracizes a fallen woman? Is she not a traitress to the cause which it is her special mission to uphold—the cause of domestic purity, of untarnished family life?


VICTOR. No doubt the same reflection occurred to the Scribes and Pharisees when they brought the woman taken in adultery to One whom they suspected of disaffection towards certain of their existing institutions. But his pure eyes saw, through the mists of the dim future, a fairer day arise, when the responsibility of the family—that unit of the State upon which its stability and strength depend—would not be thrown alone upon its weaker members; when men, of stronger passions if you will, but also stronger in the power of self-control, would scorn to exact from women a standard of moral purity they were not prepared to conform to themselves. Tracing upon the sand those mystic signs whose purport we know not, we know that his passionate soul was kindling with pity and shame, and the sorrowful indignation of the man who, amidst prevailing obscurantism, apprehends truth, who, amidst cynicism and cruelty, hungers after love. And those scathing words when his trance was ended—“*He that is without sin among you, let him first cast*



a stone at her"—how is it that they have not branded for ever our unequal moral standard with the infamy it deserves?

CECIL. That it is an unequal standard must occur at times to every one who thinks. But I have been accustomed to explain it to myself on the ground that it is based upon a natural law. The infidelity of the woman saps the very foundations of family life, confuses offspring, destroys the home, whereas the license of the man——

VICTOR. Creates a pariah - class which cannot exist without the most deadly injury to the family. How fatal to family life the existence in our midst of a class of women dedicated to impurity must be, it would seem needless to demonstrate, were it not for the paradox current in some quarters that its maintenance is actually a safeguard of the family! There is no time in a desultory conversation like the present to refute this and such-like arguments *seriatim*. We are but cursorily skimming the surface of a vast question, which branches out at every turn



into fresh ramifications. But I may tell you that science, medical and economic, is hourly proving the fallacy of any such supposition. For the rest mere common-sense, without the aid of science, ought surely to suffice. As well keep an open cesspool at your door on the plea of its being a safeguard to health, as a moral plague-spot like this in your great centres of population to preserve the purity of domestic life intact. Apart from the more obvious and hideous dangers, must not such an institution react in a thousand subtle ways upon the atmosphere of our homes? Is it not a standing education in selfishness to our sons, in stupid heartlessness to our daughters?

CECIL. What do you mean?

VICTOR. Ah! you should hear Mary on that chapter. Her education, as you know, was neither more nor less Pharisaic than is usual with girls of her class. But she has often told me that when she made for herself the discovery that these nameless ones were her sisters, made of her own flesh and blood,

only poor, only weak, only ignorant, only ground into a foul serfdom by the tender mercies of our Christian civilization, it revolutionized her life. She had been taught that it was wrong to know of their existence. When the scales fell from her eyes, she saw that in that teaching lay the root of half their wrongs. And she has told me, moreover, that it would be well if a childish, ignorant hardness were the worst result upon the characters of women, of this division of their sex into two classes, one to be cherished, the other to be destroyed. She has noted in some circles she was at one time a good deal thrown with—and who that has been much in society of late years will not confirm her words?—she has noted a deterioration among her girl companions and among women generally, which she cannot but attribute to the same source. She says that in the conditions of modern society it is impossible that the contamination should not spread beyond the limits we have tried to assign to it. One result of the increasing disproportion of wo-

men to men has been a tendency on the part of women of the upper classes to ape men's habits, amusements, dress, and so forth, and among other things, to adopt more and more the moral tone which men think good enough among themselves. How can the constant companions of "fast" men fail to become "fast" themselves? and, in the overcrowded state of the marriage-market, not endeavour to outdo in dress, manners, ay, and in morals, their most formidable competitors? It is their *métier* to affect the style the men they consort with most admire, and who shall blame them? When men really worship and reverence purity in women—not in *the* woman they intend to make the mother of their children, but in women, in womanhood—things will mend fast enough.

CECIL. I suspect from what you say that the tone of society generally has not improved during the last few years. I have been leading the life of a recluse, and though you are pleased to compliment me on having preserved a certain veneer of civilization, our

talk to-night has made me feel more than ever behind the world. I do not recollect in my college and law-student days such a condition of moral degeneracy as you describe.

VICTOR. Because, on the one hand, you had small natural affinity with it, and on the other, it never occurred to you to take cognizance of it from the, so to speak, external standpoint of the social reformer. Besides, it is true that matters have not changed for the better in recent years. How should they? We are reaping as we have sown. We have, as a community, sown to the flesh, and, as a community, we are reaping corruption. I have here a collection of notes, culled at random from the current literature of the day, and from my own personal experience, bearing on this part of our subject. Many of them are insignificant enough in themselves, merely the straws that show which way the wind blows. Will you hear a few?

CECIL. You know my *penchant* for documentary evidence.

VICTOR. The first I open to is from a

book which has recently had an almost miraculous amount of success among all classes of readers. It purports to be the history of a scholar, a Christian, and a gentleman of the seventeenth century, whose varied culture and catholic breadth of spirit are probably intended as a model for all time. This is his attitude with regard to the virtue of chastity : —“As a courtier and man of the world [John Inglesant] was profoundly tolerant of error and even of vice (provided the latter did not entail suffering on any innocent victim), looking upon it as a natural incident in human affairs.”

CECIL. Well, what more would you have?

VICTOR. Before I reply to that question let me give you the absolutely identical views of a gentleman of the nineteenth century—not a notorious *roué* whom we—I mean whom some of us, would be shy of admitting into our families—but a man neither better nor worse than other men, a “good fellow,” kind-hearted, honourable, and popular in society. He figures in one of Whyte Melville’s later

novels, called "Roy's Wife." Lord FitzOwen is, or imagines himself to be, deeply in love with a good woman, when he makes the following proposition to a friend. "Dine with me quietly, *en garçon*. I've a box at the Deucalion. We'll see the 'Ugly Duck'—its rather a good burlesque—and bring What's-her-name back to supper. It wouldn't be bad fun." Now, I need not point out to you that the author who credits a young Englishman with so much respect for women in general, and for the woman he loves in particular, is not one who is drawing on his imagination. He was, on the contrary, better qualified than most novelists to describe the bachelor life of our gilded youth. He was himself of a nobler strain than the Fitz-Owens. Commenting upon this young gentleman's theory of life, he says—"Lord Fitz-Owen's code of morals was one of which we cannot approve, the result of a false system of education. . . . He could see that it was wrong to disturb wedded happiness and the peace of families, to blight a girl's hopes, or

taint a woman's reputation before the world with the lightest breath of shame. Such injuries he would no more have inflicted than he would have . . . struck a man when he was down. To his own code of social morality, as it may be called, he adhered strictly, but this left a wide range wherein he felt at liberty to disport himself as he pleased." Is not that John Inglesant to the letter? "Tolerant of vice provided it did not entail suffering on any innocent victim, looking upon it as a natural incident in human affairs."

CECIL. Precisely; and I say again, what more can you expect? You are not, surely, sanguine enough to suppose that the "man of the world" will ever look at it in any other point of view?

VICTOR. Why should he not?


CECIL. Why? The thing is an absurdity. And so about this pariah-class, as you call it. It always has existed, and it always will exist.

VICTOR. Spare me that time-honoured argument. It has been pleaded against every reform that ever germinated in the brain

of prophet or seer, and, having drained his heart's blood, and procured for him the proud reward of cross or stake, went forth triumphant through an adoring world, and became a truism on children's lips. I am not so credulous as to suppose that we can eradicate vice, any more than that we can eradicate murder or theft. What I do maintain is that we can eradicate tolerated and approved and legalized vice, and that by a due leavening of public opinion we can place it where it should be — in the same category, morally, with murder and theft. Have we ceased to regard the soul as of greater worth than the body? It is the murder of the soul. Do we revere the body? It is the theft of all that sanctifies that "temple."

CECIL. But if the murder be already done, the theft committed?


VICTOR. Let me recall to you that social code of Lord Fitz-Owen's. He would not "strike a man when he was down." That would have been as heinous as to cheat a man at cards, break your solemn word to



a man, be guilty, in short, of any dishonourable act towards your equal and associate—*man*. But when it comes to a *woman*—when it is a woman who is “down”—what then? Plunge her lower! Heap infamy upon her! Place one more stumbling-block in the way of her retrieval! Do your best that she shall continue a by-word! You have law on your side, you have society on your side, you have—or until quite recently you had—women on your side, you have immemorial usage on your side, and that noble “always-has-been-and-always-must-be” as your excuse. Against you, you have only—shall I call it the law of God?—the immutable law of Goodness which will have mercy and not subscriptions to charity-lists, and justice rather than many missionary societies.

But we are digressing. I will now give you a “straw” of a more portentous character. I have it recorded here in the terse form of a letter addressed not a great while since to a newspaper by a lady signing herself “A Soldier’s Sister.” Referring to the case of an

ex-officer of the British Army, who was cashiered for what the judge who sentenced him described as "a wicked outrage which I must call cowardly and dishonourable," she remarks that "the world to her has been a drearier place since 359 members of a leading club have pronounced that the conduct for which he was expelled the army *has not detracted from his character as a gentleman.*" Again I refrain from commenting upon the moral condition of a society in which such a phenomenon is possible. Let us pass on. My next extract is from a *Times'* Parliamentary report of last session. It shows, as you will see, that there is something irresistibly ludicrous to our senators in women meddling with politics at all ; but that when they meddle with them at the expense of their dearest prejudices, and of their keenest susceptibilities, when they meddle with them at the cost of their happiness, their peace of mind, their health—ah me ! of their reputation itself—that then the joke becomes truly exquisite.



CECIL. You refer, of course, to the annual difficulty of clearing the Ladies' Gallery when the objectionable Acts are under discussion. I cannot bring myself to see that it is in any way necessary—nay, that it is not highly undesirable that it should be occupied on those occasions.

VICTOR. Waiving that question for the moment, you must agree with me that the manner and mood in which its clearance is sought to be effected leave something to be desired. In the course of a brief discussion on the motion to exclude strangers, the *Times* reports "laughter" no less than five times. After this the common talk about Christianity elevating the social status of woman, about chivalry "through which the reverence of man for woman became an integral part of the moral structure of society," smacks somewhat of irony. "Integral part of the structure of society!" We have not learned the A B C of true reverence for women.

CECIL. You surprise me: one would ex-

pect the graver aspects of these questions to appeal to men responsible for public affairs.

VICTOR. The causes of the anomaly, like the causes of everything else, lie buried deep in the past, and would require half a lifetime to disinter and disentangle. But one broad fact may be stated, without fear of contradiction, which accounts for a good deal. The Christian Church (though the western world owes to her the first recognition of personal purity, as a binding obligation on man and woman alike), in violent reaction against the excesses of the worn-out Pagan world, started off in very early times on a wrong tack. She made the grand—I had almost said the irretrievable error—of seeking to be wiser than Nature, wiser than God. Instead of placing purity where it was intended to be, in the very head and forefront of all the moral virtues, she gave it a second place; she subordinated *purity*, with marriage for its end and crown, and conjugal fidelity for its sacred duty and ideal, to a fantastic invention of her own called *virginity*. The result was, as

might have been foretold, a speedy lowering of the chimerical standard, and a hopeless confusion of moral ideals. Concessions had to be made to the weak, sin had to be winked at ; the doctrine of the "higher spiritual life" had to be invented—by the devil.

CECIL. And pray why—*by the devil*?

VICTOR. Because a dual standard of morality can by no possibility have any other parentage. As soon as you admit that there can be a different standard of right and wrong, in essential matters, for pope and emperor, for monk and man of the world, for clergy and laity, you open the door to every sort of logical fallacy, and every form of creeping, contemptible iniquity. You speedily reach a state of things typified by the immortal grocer of "sand-the-sugar-and-then-come-into-prayers" celebrity, or by the Italian cut-throat who mutters an orison to the Virgin, with one hand on his stiletto and the other in your pocket.

CECIL. What about the Reformation? Did not the vessel of the church shift her course a little at that time?

VICTOR. She did little more than exchange the Scylla of ceremonial for the Charybdis of dogma. And between these two she has most pitifully wavered ever since; the two opposing parties, Orthodox and Heretic, Catholic and Protestant, High and Low—call them what you will—too much occupied in vituperating each other to notice that all the time the angel of *Goodness* was standing without, forgotten and alone, yea, though his outstretched hands bore the print of the nails, and his face was, as it were, the face of the Christ.

CECIL. The charge is a terribly sweeping one.

VICTOR. Let me remind you, that I am not speaking of individuals, of the handful of men who have battled in all ages, and in all communions, and who, as I thankfully acknowledge, are battling at the present moment, with real, not with what Milton called scarecrow, sins. But ask the average clergyman or minister whether he preaches against fornication, as St. Paul did. Your

invariable reply will be something in which the phrase "mixed congregations" is chiefly audible.


CECIL. But do you not sympathize with him in his difficulty? How can he shape his discourse so that it shall not offend—I do not say the prude or the Philistine—but the little ones of his flock?

VICTOR. I wonder whether these nice considerations weighed with St. Paul when he lifted up his voice against the torrent of evil he saw threatening to overwhelm the world, or with the Baptist, when he cried to men in the wilderness to flee from the wrath to come! But tell me, where do you hear even the secondary causes of immorality denounced as they should be, and could be, without offence to any, from every pulpit in the land? Where is the prophet who proclaims that selfish luxury, that busy idleness, that the life devoted to pleasure, to sport, to tittle-tattle, or worse, is absolutely and unconditionally sinful, more sinful—I say it without a shadow of hesitation—more sinful than the

life of the wretched housebreaker or pick-pocket, than the life of the child-harlot, be she nine or nineteen? Where do you hear the hideous forced overcrowding of our people, the avarice of landlords, the supineness of municipalities to the health and morals of the people denounced as they ought to be? Where do you hear the miserable condition of the large majority of working women and domestic servants exposed as it should be—the horrible extortion and oppression, whether voluntary or not, of the employers of women's labour, the starvation rate of wages, literally forcing them into sin, the total absence of every form of innocent recreation such as the young need, of all cheerful kindly sympathy in their bitter struggle for existence?

CECIL. To hear you talk, one would suppose the "Song of the Shirt" might have been written yesterday.

VICTOR. Ay, and its sequel the "Bridge of Sighs." There are at the present moment in London about 60,000 working girls earning wages barely sufficient to support life. What



do you say, for instance, to shirt-making at 2d., 1 $\frac{3}{4}$ d., sometimes *one penny* each? The white slave, thus remunerated, can make six or eight, perhaps even a dozen shirts in a day, by sitting at her machine from six in the morning till twelve at night. Out of this stupendous wage *she has to find her own thread*. Or her trade, perchance, is the making of women's ulsters. For one of these garments, selling at 7s. 11d., she will be paid 2d.; for one selling at 25s., 6d. She can, with difficulty, make six in a day, and thus earn a glorious income, out of which, as you may imagine, she scarcely misses 5d. for every dozen ulsters spent in twist and cotton! Or she is an apprentice, aged fifteen, in a house of business, a mile or two from her home. The walk is long, the hours of attendance are long, and she is often very weary. And she earns 2s., sometimes 1s. a week!

CECIL. And your theory is that this miserable and really iniquitous rate of payment is one of the great feeders of the social evil?

VICTOR. Is it necessary to talk of *theories*?

Do not the *facts* stare one in the face? And yet we scorn, and yet we condemn, and yet we pass by on the other side. How can we expect self-control, self-denial, self-respect, from those poor shivering, underfed bodies, to whom a hearty meal, a warm good garment, an hour's frolic, comes only in the form of temptation? It grows late, and the notebook, which you have had too much of already, must be put away for to-night, or I could poison your dreams with some entries under this head.

CECIL. There is time for one or two.

VICTOR. A lady who devotes herself to some of these friendless ones, principally young servants who have forfeited their characters, writes: "The feeding of poor girls at home has much to do with their unsatisfactory service. They go with a weak body to work hard—no appetite when they can get food." Another lady says—"I know of a workroom where they have no fires until a certain date, no matter how cold it may be. During last November the girls suffered

horribly, and for one of them I had to procure a ticket as out-patient to a hospital, her delicacy having been chiefly induced through constant suffering from cold whilst at work." A doctor at Islington informs a daily paper that "within half a mile of my place there are a large number of retail establishments, chiefly of the cheap and competing kind, and at the present time I have on my books more than a dozen patients, young women, whose ailments are entirely attributable to the excessive number of hours they are compelled to work, and to their being constantly on their feet." These same patients are described as "some weak and fragile, others more robust, but all alike suffering *intense* pain, the natural consequence of being on their feet thirteen or fourteen hours every day, and sixteen or seventeen on a Saturday. . . ." And now to bed, with what appetite for sleep you may!

CECIL. Stay a moment. Time was made for slaves. Do you know you have touched me a good deal for these young creatures?

VICTOR. If I could tell you all that I have heard from a woman's lips of what women, even women of the well-nourished classes, suffer from the frailty of their bodies—the chronic lassitude, the regiment of woes falling under the to us mysterious head of “nerves,” the hidden sufferings of potential and actual motherhood which suck the energy and verve from life, as we men know it—but I have said enough. Cecil! it is time we shook off the selfishness of our cynicism, whether of word or act, and rose to a manlier view of our responsibilities towards the other sex. It is time we assumed something of the prerogative of strength; protection, even of the vile; pity, even for the temptress, spoiled, seared, bestialized by sin; reverence even for that most horrible, and happily rare thing, a womanhood tainted from the birth by hereditary guilt, and altogether past redemption by any effort of ours. Shall we not remember—

“What 'tis to be a man—to curb and spurn
The tyrant in us—that ignobler self,

Which boasts not loathes its likeness to the brute,
And owns no good save ease, no ill save pain !”

CECIL. Believe me, I do not speak mockingly when I say that I am ashamed to interrupt you with a reflection that has occurred to me more than once in the course of your remarks. But you will not misunderstand me. You have incidentally referred to a difference of opinion as to the *necessity* for the existence of an outcast class. I think you have disposed of your opponents' case from the more strictly social point of view. But you have touched very lightly upon the hygienic question. If I am rightly informed, the medical faculty are not altogether at one upon the point, and I understand that some doctors of repute are in the habit of giving young men counsel diametrically opposed to that which you would offer them.

VICTOR. Believe me, I do not speak thoughtlessly when I say that I am ashamed, always deeply ashamed and humiliated, when I am called upon to encounter that argument. It shows a profound ignorance of sound

human physiology, which teaches us that self-government is the principle of individual health, and chastity the condition of a strong national growth. Two words should guide medical counsel—Temperance and Occupation. But usually I prefer to meet this difficulty with a *reductio ad absurdum*. If the existence of a class of *hetæraæ* is a *necessity*, it should be not only, as indeed it is already, recognized by law as an industry like any other, but respected socially as an important factor in the national health and well-being. It should be recruited—if there is anything in the enthusiasm of humanity—not solely from the daughters of the people, because, forsooth, they are the most defenceless ; but fathers and brothers of the well-to-do classes, willing Jephthahs, should occasionally, from patriotic motives——

CECIL. Hold! hold! A jest may be carried too far.

VICTOR. Not in this connection. What do you say, for instance, to the jest of a magistrate at Orleans the other day, who,

when a poor victim was about to name the wealthy scoundrel who had been her moral murderer, shut her mouth with, "Hush! Do not compromise *the honour of a respectable man!*" But this in passing. No, I do but depict the logical consequence of these theories about the *necessity* of vice. All I have said should, logically, take place, and something more. We should pull down, not only our churches—that goes without saying—but the institutes and lecture-rooms where we inculcate humanity, ay, and the hospitals and asylums where we practise it. We should once and for ever do away with our religion, of course, but equally with our cant of virtue, of altruism, of a race made perfect by upward striving, and glorious by self-renunciation. If we are so inconceivably selfish, cruel, and cynical as to set aside in cold blood a certain number of thousands of poor girls—*not being* OUR OWN *sisters and daughters*—as a holocaust, natural and *necessary* for the good of the community—why, we may talk of Suttee and the torturing of Hindu widows, we may

talk of the atrocities of Mohammedan harems and of Australian savagedom—the only difference between these degraded barbarians and ourselves will be that we shall be a thousand times more degraded, more contemptible, more unspeakable than they, for we have prided ourselves on our civilization, we have prated of virtue, we have received, century after century, upon our foreheads the symbol of self-effacement, the sign of the Cross, and we have called ourselves for ages by the name of the pure and compassionate Christ.

* * * * *

CECIL. I was thinking how our conversation began. Was it not with Aimée and the “shrieking sisterhood”? I should be glad to hear more of your views on the subject of the Repeal agitation, and its relation to the broader questions we somehow drifted into discussing.


VICTOR. That must be for another day. In the meanwhile, beware of regarding it as *anything* but what it is—a symptom of a

great moral revolution. It is not a spasmodic, isolated phenomenon ; it is a precursor of a change already stirring in the secret heart of multitudes. The smuggling of those amazing and iniquitous Acts into our Statute-book (in other countries, as you may not know, they exist only in the form of police regulations) was but the spark falling on the tinder, the last drop in the over-full cup. Like the great kindred movement for the abolition of slavery, this movement is the product of the world's growth in the humaner virtues, of the late blossoming of loving-kindness, mercy, and equity. We may call in question, if we choose, its mode of operation, the details of its programme, the feasibility, nay, the sanity of its immediate aims ; but the *principles* which gave it birth are their own justification, and carry within them the germs of future, absolute triumph.

CECIL. You are not too sanguine ?

VICTOR. Who said that history was prophecy ? Even a superficial study of history makes one something of a soothsayer. There

was a time when the conscience of the world was ripe for a protest against the traffic in human flesh. The world knew it not. Slavery *always had been*, and, so it was said, *always would be*; but those who could read the signs of the times knew that it was doomed, and that had the nations been polled, and the result been a minority of one against the fated institution, still that *the world would come round to that minority of one*. Emerson spake truly. And so it is now. The world is ripe, not for perfection, not for Paradise, not for Utopia, but for the abolition of vice legalized, vice patented, vice tolerated in society with a toleration strangely like acquiescence, if not approval. That portent that struck you just now with horror and amazement—the descent of pure women into the arena—is perhaps the most momentous of them all. Well may it amaze, even appal you! It is a measure of the significance of the combat. This protest of women against the systematized degradation of their sex, against the desecration of marriage, against



the undermining of the family, is a profounder thing than you know. It is unperceived, nine-tenths of it ; it is as yet immature ; but it is growing fast ; its root are striking deep into the soil of the civilized world, and it will not fail to bear fruit upward.

There was a picture of Long's in the Academy two or three years back—you were in the Bush—which held me spellbound. It represented Esther, the Queen, seated in royal apparel. She is about to carry out her grand resolve. It is a question of life or death. In her fixed pathetic eyes you read, "If I perish, I perish." You cannot take away your own from them. The details, the *technique* of the picture are lost in that absorbed, absorbing gaze, tranquil, heroic, pitiful. I think of Esther now as symbolic of the woman of the nineteenth century, sacrificing life itself in the cause, not merely of her people, not even of her sex, but of humanity.

Oftener I compare her to Godiva, staking something dearer than life in the high enterprise, stripping herself bare of the very vesture

of her soul, rather than see the poor of her people become a prey, the rich given over to selfish indulgence and shortsighted cruelty. It is no hyperbolical phrase that I use when I say, "dearer than life."

"'You would not let your little finger ache
For such as *these*?' 'But I would die,' she said"—

the Godiva of old. And she *would* have died, probably would have preferred death to the grisly alternative which she accepted for the people's sake.

From the new Godiva, too, a harder thing than the mere laying down of one's life has been required. From her, too, it has been exacted to place upon the altar *her reputation*, exposing herself to something worse than mere physical torture, to a species of misconception more exquisitely agonizing than the most ingenious refinement of bodily suffering. For her the delight of living is gone, the invigorating charm of social pleasures, the early, innocent gladness of the world. Friendship, the consoler, is often spoiled for her; some-

times she is cut off from love—the breath of life. Over all her pathway a shadow lies, and when her eyes are brightest, and her talk gayest, the heaviness of this thing is at her heart.

Oh, the leaven has been working for years ! Thinking women of the last generation saw well enough that the existing social code was rotten, a pitiable convention, one half prudery, the other half laxity—

“Whose pureness rooted in impureness stood,”

to adapt a line of the Laureate.

They saw even then that something less hollow, less negative, less hypocritical, was required. They craved even then a more passionate goodness, a more militant purity, and in their lives and writings they presaged dimly the bursting forth of the flame that was smouldering in their day. The works of Elizabeth Barrett Browning are charged with this sense of crying need and of coming change. It was strong in Harriet Martineau and in Mary Carpenter. Earlier still, it

kindled the "genius for benevolence" in Elizabeth Fry, and drew her, tender and tremulous and self-distrustful as she was, with irresistible force to the filth and infamy of the female side of Newgate. Were that grand spirit among us now, with what holy joy would she have united in the crusade initiated by her spiritual daughter, Josephine Butler, supported in different ways and at different points of the field of battle by women like Fanny Vicars and Ellice Hopkins, Frances Power Cobbe, Elizabeth Blackwell, and Emily Venturi, and sanctioned by a name dear to every English heart, the honoured name of Florence Nightingale!

CECIL. And the name of my sister-in-law—the sweet child I remember—is to be added to the bede-roll! I still cannot find it in my heart to bear that *she* should suffer *so*.

VICTOR. Mary and I sometimes agree that heroism *à deux* is not so very heroic after all, and that martyrdom *together* would be quite possible to bear. But since when have reformers trodden a primrose path? Since

when have they not been despised and rejected of men—men and women of sorrows and acquainted with grief—from whom the world they shed their blood for hides, as it were, its face? And then, there is solace in high endeavour, and the very balm of Gilead in a great conviction. This new conception of one moral law for man and woman, this late-won truth that prudery is not purity, and that laxity is merely baseness, that, if there be any virtue or any praise, the “sacred human principle of sex” is to be recognized from the first with a reverent candour, and trained from the first with religious awe, and that only sin is shameful—this, too, has its consolations, its brighter aspects, its glimpses of solemn, energizing rapture.

And the rest Time rectifies. The day is not far distant when we shall look back with a certain ashamed incredulity at our past selves—we who have mocked, or opposed, or stood aloof—and admit that while we loathed to see the people over-taxed, while we shuddered and blundered, multiplied churches, subscribed

to charities, tinkered at our Poor Law and fought over our School Boards, some women had had the inconceivable courage and devotion to grapple personally with the most deadly, difficult, and distasteful of all the causes at the bottom of the pauperism, crime, and threatened national disintegration with which we were contending, and that the New Godiva—

“Did more, and underwent and overcame.”

THE WESTERN HAREM.

“Polygamy is at present, my daughter, often more real at Paris than at Constantinople.”—AUGUSTE COMTE’S *Catechism of Positive Religion*.

DURING the short period immediately following the death of a celebrated man, or the publication of an important book, when it rains criticisms, biographical notices, and comments, embodying every variety of praise or dispraise, it is sometimes possible, amid the clamour, to disentangle a note of truer *timbre* than the rest, and having a real and permanent significance. In the case of a recent work which was for several weeks in everybody’s hands and on everybody’s lips—

the autobiography of an extremely popular novelist and typical Englishman—such a note was sounded by a weekly contemporary with remarkable clearness and, it might be added, courage.

Mr. Trollope [says the writer in question] was thoroughly in earnest in wishing to teach a high morality by his tales, and no tales could be purer than his from anything like mischief; at the same time we should say that what he understood as a high morality was a morality of a very limited kind, and involved little more for men and women in general than insisting that girls should be modest and loving, and that men should be honest and diligent, and should know their own minds. *He hardly even teaches so much as that men should be pure as well as women, or that women should be courageous as well as men.*

Now, granting—as most of us will probably be disposed to grant—that “conduct is three-fourths of life,” it follows that the first test to which the works of a voluminous writer who counts his readers by hundreds of thousands should be brought is the ethical test. And it also follows that a thoughtful representative of the higher criticism, convinced of the profound importance of conduct, and sensitive to

moral discords as an accomplished musician to material ones, is within his rights in demanding that such a writer shall not inculcate as high morality what is in truth "a morality of a very limited kind." "Conduct is three-fourths of life." More; the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the ending, of the existence of civilized human beings, in whom civilization is not the thin veneer of selfishness and savagery, are goodness; and the popular novelist—that powerful preacher who has never entered a pulpit, that orator more persuasive than any that ever mounted platform, that force more penetrative than press, than stage, even than direct personal influence—should doubtless, theoretically, be ranged on the side, not of conventional decorum, but of the highest goodness which has been revealed to the highest minds.

At the same time, it must always be borne in mind that a popular author is, more than any man, the child of his age. Were he too much in advance of it, it would not read him; indeed, he is its darling mainly because he

confines himself to ideals that it can understand, does not aspire to anything beyond the average work-a-day moral code of the average citizen, and does not fatigue with unfamiliar speculation or new-fangled, disquieting enthusiasms. Probably no English writer of modern times reflects more exactly than Trollope this comfortable, old-fashioned moral code, which, in the main, embodies to this hour the loftiest pitch at which the ethical aspirations of his countrymen have arrived. And it is precisely because his opinions are typical English opinions that we may permit ourselves to make use of his autobiographical confession of faith in order to illustrate the old order of morality, which, in the opinion of many, is destined to change, "giving place to new." Our modern critic, on the other hand, who has the hardihood to require of an author that he shall teach "men to be pure as well as women, and women to be courageous as well as men," may stand for the type of the new school of thinkers whose endeavour it is, in the teeth of prejudice and

tradition, and of the opposition—official, orthodox, and scientific, as well as merely malicious and selfish—which every reform must expect to encounter, to promulgate what they understand by the higher morality.

The difference between the two schools lies in a nutshell. It may be summed up in one word—*equality between the sexes*. Not equality in social and civil rights—the important questions, separate though allied, involved in claims such as these are beside our purpose for the moment—but *equality in virtue*. Now, theoretically, equality in virtue has long been recognized in the Western world, ever since, in fact, the Founder of Christianity refused to sanction the punishment by a cruel death of an erring woman, except at the hands of an accuser who could himself be proved to be immaculate. But, like other doctrines of the same teacher, this doctrine of the equality of the sexes in virtue has since practically fallen into desuetude. He denounced war, and we carry on war, not as a tragic and humiliating necessity which

we deplore, but as a thing meet for chaplains to pray over, and post-prandial orators to glorify. He deprecated riches, and we spend annual thousands upon luxurious dwellings and amusements not remarkably elevating, while the little children that he loved are growing up at our doors into a compulsory proletariat, gangrened with theft, fornication, and drink. He fulminated against pride, with those thunders of fiery indignation which are known only to the gentle soul once thoroughly aroused to the ungentleness of the world, and we—blinded by an imbecile idolatry of rank, of money, of political importance and social distinction—we look askance upon everybody who is not in our own set! The truth is, unfortunately, that the ethical creed of Jesus of Nazareth is not the ethical creed of the modern club and drawing-room, if indeed it may truly be said to be the creed of the modern pulpit, and there is really great scope for the reformer in more than one department of Christian morals.

But to return to our point—the practical

rejection by nominally Christian society of the Christian doctrine of equality in virtue. It is impossible to illustrate this better than by placing side by side in parallel columns the experiences of a young man in London, as given in the "Autobiography," with those of a young girl in London as given by herself. The young girl is imaginary, but her story, unhappily, is not. It is a story which any one who will give himself the trouble may hear any day of the week in real life.

HIS STORY.

And now, looking back at it, I have to ask myself whether my youth was very wicked? I did no good in it ; but was there fair ground for expecting good from me ? When I reached London no mode of life was prepared for me—no advice even given to me. I went into lodgings, and then had to dispose of my time. I belonged to no club, and knew very few friends who would receive me into their houses. In such

HER STORY.

And now, looking back at it, I have to ask myself whether my youth was very wicked? I did no good in it ; but was there fair ground for expecting good from me ? When I reached London no mode of life was prepared for me—no advice even given to me. I went into lodgings, some distance from my place of business, and then had to dispose of my time. I had not heard of a Girl's Friendly Society, and did not know of any

a condition of life, a young man should no doubt go home after his work, and spend the long hours of the evening in reading good books and drinking tea. . . . No training had been given me. There was no house in which I could habitually see a lady's face and hear a lady's voice. No allure-ment to decent respect-ability came in my way. It seems to me that in such circumstances the temptations to loose life will almost certainly prevail with a young man. Of course, if the mind be strong enough, and the general stuff knitted together of sufficiently stern material, the temptations will not prevail. But such minds and such materials are, I think, uncommon. The temptation, at any rate, prevailed with me.

place where I could obtain rest and recreation after hours of toil. In such a condition of life a young woman should no doubt go home after her work, and spend the long hours of the evening in reading good books and drinking tea. . . . No training had been given me. There was no friend's house in which I could learn refinement and self-respect, or could innocently enjoy the society of men. My only opportunities of this nature occurred during my walks home at night. *Scarcely a day passed that I was not accosted in the street by some person, usually of gentlemanlike appearance.* No allure-ment to decent respect-ability came in my way. It seems to me that in such circumstances the temptations to loose life will almost certainly prevail with a young woman. At any rate, they prevailed with me.

Now compare the attitude of society towards these two offenders. To the stronger of the two, the one who has been taught from the cradle that he is the superior, that it is his part to act and to command, hers to admire and to obey, that it is his to make and to administer the laws that control them both, his not merely to protect his country from external foes, but zealously to guard against any infringement of the rights and liberties of the weakest of his fellow-subjects—to the young man society says, “You were young like the rest of us, and you sowed your wild oats. It was wrong, perhaps, but it was natural, almost inevitable. We can scarcely blame—certainly we cannot punish you.” To the weaker of the two, who has been bred up from the cradle to a degree of dependence, there is nothing in her after-life to justify, who is encouraged in ignorance, and fortified—we may be forgiven the paradox—in feebleness; who, if she learned anything at Sunday-school, learned that yieldingness, docility, resignation, and obedience were ex-

cellent things in woman, while mankind, in the concrete form of the School Board visitor, the rent-collector, the parson, and the policeman, were to her as gods—to the young girl society says, “You should know how to take care of yourself. To have acted so you must necessarily be a corrupt and vicious person. We can have nothing more to do with you. Take yourself out of our sight.”

And what do the young man and the young woman respectively reply? Again the man's answer may be taken verbatim from the Autobiography of our typical Englishman.

If the rustle of a wowan's petticoat has ever stirred my blood; if a cup of wine has been a joy to me; if I have thought tobacco at midnight in pleasant company to be one of the elements of an earthly paradise; if, now and again, I have somewhat recklessly fluttered a £5 note over a card-table; of what matter is that to any reader? I have betrayed no woman. Wine has brought me to no sorrow. It has been the companionship of smoking that I have loved, rather than the habit. I have never desired to win money, and I have lost none. To enjoy the excitement of pleasure, but to be free from its vices and ill-effects—to have the sweet and leave the bitter untasted—that has been my study. . . . I will not say that I have never scorched finger; but I carry no ugly wounds.

Have we here a confession of guilt? Most certainly not. It is the old story, "I am not better than other people. I am no saint"—(strange that you do not find this engaging frankness where what men are *really* ashamed of is in question, "I am no saint—I lied, or I ran away, or I cheated at cards!")—the sort of plea, in short, which is merely "Not Guilty" writ large. Because he has *betrayed no woman*—because, that is, he has stopped short of a depth of cowardly infamy which is only *not* avenged like murder and *not* spurned like fraud, because—alas for our manhood! and alas for our civilization! and alas for our Christianity! it happens too often—because he has stopped short of this last abyss—the man has almost, forsooth, the right to plume himself! That he has been helping to maintain a class of outcasts made such, directly or indirectly, by his cruelty, kept such by his selfishness, that he has knocked one more nail into the coffin of some unhappy woman's self-respect, health, happiness, and hopes of heaven; that he has helped to lower instead

of raising that standard of current public opinion¹ by which—and not by any higher one—the young habitually measure themselves, so making it more difficult instead of more easy for all other boys to be pure and all other girls to be modest—that he has done all this counts for nothing with the man. He “*carries no ugly wounds.*”

And the woman? What is the woman's answer to those her accusers? Why, the woman, stupefied by centuries of injustice, of

¹ Whether there is need for such modification of public opinion or no may be gathered from such expressions of it as—for instance—the following, taken from an article on Lord Dalhousie's Criminal Law Amendment Bill in a leading weekly journal. “It attempts,” says the writer, “to effect a thing which *all the wisest and best of men*”—the italics are mine—“have hitherto recognized to be impossible, and which *most of them have held to be undesirable*, the total suppression of prostitution.” “*Which most of them have held to be undesirable.*” Comment is needless. The mere repetition of the words will suffice. After all, the worthy writer blasphemes in good company. St. Augustine himself was one of these “*best and wisest men,*” recognizing in the humiliation of a section of women, the safeguard of the “*honour*” (!) of husbands and fathers. Most reverend Saint! Most Christian Christendom!

inequality in virtue, dazed by the ostracism which has excluded her from all contact with the pure, nay, with the respectable, and converted her from a victim into a pest, maddened at last into believing that they speak truth who say to her, "You were the weaker, *therefore* you should have withstood; Nature already chastises your errors with whips—*therefore* the world does right to chastise them with scorpions," the woman merely takes up the despairing cry of the outcast of old, "God and man be merciful to me a sinner!"

And this injustice of society is buttressed by the law, which, in these matters, takes care to lag well behind the public conscience, lest haply it might be in any true sense an educator, a guide to the unlearned and mentor to the weak in principle. The law encourages in the man, not merely ante-nuptial immorality—that it must be understood to take for granted—but conjugal infidelity itself. It allows him to plead the "consent" (!) of a child of thirteen to her own destruction ;^{*} it

^{*} See Note, page 74.

freely permits to him that "solicitation" and "loitering for immoral purposes" which it punishes in the woman ; it abets him in the maintenance of a class of women-chattels by robbing them of their constitutional rights and reducing their degradation to a system ; finally, it authorizes in him the greatest moral insult which a husband can offer to a wife, provided only that it is not accompanied with the lesser outrage of physical violence.

Of course there is a stereotyped answer to all this—that this so-called injustice is founded upon natural law. In the words of another hebdomadal writer, discoursing upon this very subject of divorce in connection with Woman's Suffrage—

"Nature and common-sense created the inequality before it was recognized by law ; nor could it without scandalous impropriety be removed by legislation. . . . It is a sufficient answer to the charge of injustice that a man cannot without dishonour condone infidelity, while a woman may, without injury to her character, forgive the offence, if it has been discontinued. The reasons for the distinction are notorious and transparent. . . . If female voters are likely to insist on an equality which has no foundation in natural law, there is one more strong reason against the concession of their demands."

The rejoinder has a plausible sound, but that it is really based upon a fallacy can be shown in a very few words. It is *not* a "sufficient answer to the charge of injustice" that "a woman *may*, without injury to her character, forgive the offence" of infidelity, for the simple reason that she is allowed no choice in the matter. The law does not say to the woman, "You *may* forgive the offence," but, "You *must* forgive it." It is in the *compulsion* exercised in the one case and not in the other that the injustice lies, and, as will presently be shown, that the impolicy (looking at the matter from the lowest utilitarian standpoint) lies also. Whatever those "notorious and transparent" reasons which appeared to the framers of the law of divorce sufficiently cogent to justify the unequal exercise of this compulsion, they unfortunately do not appeal with anything like convincing force to the minds of an increasing body of educated Englishwomen.¹ There may have been a time—

¹ It is curious that this truth should not be realized more distinctly in quarters where one might have

a time not very remote—when they would have passed unchallenged by even a high-minded woman ; when, content to be, in some sort, the property, instead of the companion, of man, and acknowledging the equity of the classification which ranked her with minors and idiots, even the best kind of woman may

expected it to make some way. No less an authority, for example, than Mr. George Lewis, if we may judge by a recent article contributed by him to the *Fortnightly Review*, appears to hold that a reform in the law of divorce, falling very far short of equal justice for husband and wife, will content women. He suggests, among other modifications of the existing law that a woman should be entitled to a divorce “for adultery committed by her husband in her home, or under disgraceful or aggravating circumstances” !—thereby leaving it to be inferred, not only that there are conceivable circumstances in which the husband’s adultery is *not* disgraceful, and *not* an unspeakable insult to the wife, but, moreover, that the wife will acquiesce in the distinction, and will thankfully accept this magnanimous concession—if she should have the opportunity of doing so—to her just claims. The whole article is meant to be—and indeed is—a generous protest against the woman being “left unequally weighted by the law ;” but it falls curiously short of the mark, as all attempts at reform will do that leave the root of the matter untouched.

really have felt less outraged by her husband's infidelities than he by hers, and may have acquiesced in the social and physiological arguments (or assumptions) by which he supported his position. But that time has now gone by. It is not for nothing that the higher education has been placed within the reach of women, and that, after having been (with some hesitation) conceded a soul, it has at length begun to be admitted (partially) that woman has a mind. The tendency of things for some years past has been in the direction of raising her from the position of man's chattel to that of his equal (not his embittered rival, but his friendly assessor), and during the process she has made for herself the discovery of a "natural law," not less authoritative, nor less firmly rooted in fact and in history, than those other "natural laws" that have been so often flung in her teeth in connection with inequality in virtue.

The natural law is this: that in sexual virtue, as in other things, the husband and the

wife, the man and the woman, stand or fall together. Here, too—


“ The woman’s cause is man’s ; they rise or sink
Together, dwarfed or godlike, bond or free ; ”

and, consequently, such legislation and such social conventions as seek to secure the chastity of the one, while they encourage the unchastity of the other, not only bear the brand of iniquity, but are necessarily foredoomed to failure. They ignore or they contradict one great natural law, while ostensibly maintaining another, and in so doing they overreach themselves, and inevitably defeat their avowed object. The proof is not far to seek. In every country, in every class, in every epoch notorious for moral corruption, male laxity has for its invariable concomitant female levity—witness Athens and Rome in their decadence, witness our own Restoration and the Paris of the Regency and Second Empire ; witness all aristocracies festered with idleness and hypocrisy, or those less guilty, hopeless, homeless, bestialized masses who are the crime and the

curse of our modern Babylons. The evidence of history upon this point is conclusive, though, indeed, the appeal to history is, or ought to be, superfluous in a question of plain common-sense. The attempt to preserve intact the honour of certain women, because it concerns the honour of certain men that it should be so preserved, while, outside the charmed circle, every man is a law unto himself, is, on the face of it, as puerile as it is unrighteous. It is like drawing a line of chalk round the bed of a healthy child in a fever-stricken nursery, and assuming that no germ of disease will have the temerity to cross the boundary. Moral contamination — infinitely more subtle than any known form of physical contagion—insinuates itself in a hundred known and in a thousand unknown ways, where its presence is least suspected and least desired. Evils obvious and horrible, evils less obvious, but perhaps on that very account more dangerous, spread with a rapidity little dreamed of by those who are most concerned to avert them ; the leaven works till society becomes

corrupt to the core, and, at last, there is not a woman to whom purity is a thing absolutely beautiful and sacred, because there is not a man to whom it is imperative. "If chastity is a law for woman, it must be so for every woman without exception ; and if it is a law for every woman, it follows necessarily that it must be equally so for every man." Here is the true "natural law," from which there is no escape. The choice is between this and chaos.

The fact is so self-evident that it is necessary to look beyond the favourite arguments of supporters of inequality in virtue, in order to account for men's blindness to it. There is something more behind—when a true sociology has dismissed objections founded on false notions of "honour," and a true human physiology has disposed of that libel on nature—the supposed inherent necessity of a dual moral law. What is really at the root of the reluctance to acknowledge equality in virtue is, as has been hinted before, the subjection of women, the desire (often less a desire than a mere unconscious instinct) that



women should remain in a state of tutelage, and that the growing movement in a contrary direction should not make way. It is curious with what persistency this instinct of possessing some sort of property in women lingers on in the civilized world. We talk of the degradation of the zenana and of the harem ; but we fail to see that all institutions whatsoever that keep grown women in a condition of pupilage—to use no stronger term—tend to deteriorate both them and their masters, and that, in particular, the moral or immoral license accorded to the one sex and strictly denied to *the appropriated portion* of the other, means simply polygamy, with all its attendant evils, direct and indirect.

The Western Harem—it has an odd sound—but this it is which really stands in the way of a true moral equality between men and women, and consequently of a higher general standard of social life. It is, virtually, the unacknowledged survival, in the Western world, of what was once a universally recognized institution, supposed to be based upon

an unassailable "natural law." Few, perhaps, save the most cynical, would care to openly admit the fact, yet fact it is, that the principle of the harem has as real and practical an existence in our midst as some of the institutions of which we are proudest—as the Church, for instance, or the army, or the police. The Christian form of the institution must be understood to include metaphorically, not merely the wife and the chattels, past or present, of the representative of Western civilization who is its owner, but also all his near female relatives, all those women whose dishonour, *because they belong to him*, is his dishonour, although the converse does not hold good, *his* dishonour affecting nobody—not even himself. Safe beneath his ægis, enclosed, figuratively speaking, in the impregnable fortress of his name and fame, whoever touches them, or even suffers the breath of slander to approach them, does so at his peril.

But outside the harem walls? There womanhood is no longer sacred ; there a woman who has no proprietor becomes the lawful

prey of the first-comer ; respect for property not intervening to protect her, nothing else intervenes. There is not found a chivalrous reverence for woman, *as such*, nor any thirst after a manlike purity *for its own sake*. That a woman has fallen is not the trumpet-call to every noble and wise-hearted man to raise her again as speedily as may be ; rather it is the signal to deepen her degradation and do her to moral death. That opinion, that usage, that law, all tend to his impunity and to her enslavement and outlawry is not a thought which fills a man with shame and indignation ; that the class of appropriated and protected women treat him with lenience, while they will not have their ears polluted with the mention of her name, is not a fact which sickens and appals him. Rather, he slips into an ignoble acquiescence in the injustice of opinion, of usage, of law, and of protected women, avails himself of it as a convenient, if not a righteous arrangement, and moves no finger to combat wrongs which in many a conscience-stricken moment, many a mise-

rable, ghost-haunted vigil, he knows to be unspeakable.

For, indeed, the Nemesis of these wrongs, so long unrecognized, so long unavenged, has overtaken him ; and the man who sets little store by the virile virtue of purity pays for his error by a lessening hold upon other virtues—virtues which are vulgarly accounted of a more masculine and vertebrate order, such as honour, truth, love of fair play, generosity, and magnanimity. His religion becomes a lie, his moral code a specious hypocrisy ; he loses the sense of the sacredness of personal rights : whole classes of the community cease for him to be persons at all ; they become *things* to be regulated as he regulates gin-shops, or factory-chimneys, or sewers. The principles which govern his procedure are cynical principles, and, the constituent elements of cynicism being cruelty, animalism, and disbelief in any higher nature than its own, it is needless to add that the methods inspired by it are not methods tending in the direction of the more humane and chivalrous virtues.

And what is true of individuals is true of nations, who are but individuals in the aggregate. The results upon national stamina and *morale* of the Oriental attitude towards one-half of the human race, of the respect for purity in a section of women because it is expedient (the principle of the harem), instead of the respect for purity in every human being because it differentiates us from the brutes, because it is wholesome and righteous, because it is beautiful, rational, and divine, the results of this perversion are evident enough among the peoples who pass for being in the van of civilization; most notoriously and tragically evident in the most (outwardly) highly civilized of them all. In France, purity, being supposed to appertain scarcely even to the married woman, but merely to the school-girl, to the "*jeune fille*," has long been degraded to the level of other school-girlish attributes, with the natural consequence that despotism and brutality, whether of monarch or of State, have struck roots of iron into an emasculate and polluted soil, and we

have phenomena like the goading of a disaffected soldiery to gratuitous carnage; like the forcible expulsion of a harmless religious order; like the nightly raid of a Police of Immorality through the streets, sweeping fallen and unfallen alike into its net of perdition.

It is such flagrant violations of justice and decency as this last which have at length thoroughly aroused the friends of liberty and morality at home and abroad, and convinced them that if wrong is not to be remedied by more grievous wrong, and evil by stronger incitements to evil; if the principle of the harem is not to receive the direct sanction of Governments, and to be *authorized* in crushing the manhood out of men and trampling on the rights of women; that if the deliberate encouragement of what is basest in both is not to go on making every day a little less possible, a little less desired, the dawn of that kingdom of heaven which is *within us*—that if all this is not to be they must speak out.

And here we are reminded of that daring

critic whom we chose as the mouthpiece of the revolt against inequality in virtue, to the latter clause of whose bold demand "that men should be pure as well as women, and women courageous as well as men," we have as yet paid no heed. The stand against recent ugly forms of despotism and injustice, and against the Oriental morality of which they are the natural outcome, could not be made by men alone, with whatever generous enthusiasm and high-minded disinterestedness and devotion a minority of men might join, have joined, in the struggle. The co-operation, nay, the initiative, of women was indispensable for many reasons, chiefly for the breaking down of those foolish and illogical social conventions of which women are—if not the framers—at any rate the staunchest conservators, and which deal such different measure to different classes of offenders against the moral law. Their help, too, is needed in education, which is as yet, in these matters, only making its first tottering efforts towards the light; it is needed for influencing, pro-

tecting, and restoring women ; it is needed for destroying the false delicacy which glosses over and fosters evil, and for maintaining the true delicacy which abhors and extirpates it. Now all this requires courage—courage of the highest order—so that, unless women awake to the necessity of becoming more brave, more strong, and more independent, unless they increasingly respond to the demand of the higher morality that they shall be courageous as well as men, there is scarcely a possibility that men will ever fulfil with less miserable inadequacy than they do at present the requirement made of them that they shall be pure as well as women.

The mandate is a strange one in both its aspects, new and strange and very audacious, as we began by remarking. But it has this justification, that the times are ripe for it ; that the animal in the man, that the coward in the woman, will go near to sap the foundations of modern States, as they have sapped the foundations of ancient ones, if it be not obeyed ; while, if it be laid to heart, our Christianity

will become less hollow, and our humanity less hypocritical, and we shall with some pretence at sincerity co-operate with the forces that make for progress and mould the race to noble ends. That a doctrine is unfamiliar is no proof that it is unsound. We have hitherto, for the most part, said to a man, Be brave. We say to him now, Be pure. We have hitherto, for the most part, said to a woman, Be pure. We say to her now, Be brave. And what though the like teaching has not been heard before—or seldom heard—in the history of the world? “It is not history,” said Amiel, the sweet-souled Genevan mystic, who to a celestial purity of heart united a very delicate and subtle vein of philosophic thought —“It is not history which teaches righteousness to the conscience; it is the conscience which teaches righteousness to history. The actual is corrupting. It is we who rectify it by loyalty to the ideal.”

ZOLA IN ENGLAND.

“Je conçois des œuvres où tous les personnages seraient méchants, et qui pourtant seraient morales ; ce seraient celles qui, en me promenant dans l'enfer, me donneraient l'amour passionné du ciel.”

EDGAR QUINET.

“Hold thou the good : define it well :
For fear divine Philosophy
Should push beyond her mark, and be
Procuress to the Lords of Hell.”


“IN MEMORIAM.”

NOT the least curious among certain recent phenomena, which have arrested the attention of the friends of progress (the word is used here in its wider signification, as implying the advance of a higher morality at least as much as that of intellectual culture or scientific discovery) has been the translation into English, extensive advertisement, and probably more extensive sale, of the novels of Emile Zola. While there is much in the

signs of the times to encourage those whose aim it is "to plant the standard of humanity some furlongs forward into chaos," and who see in the elevated or the debased moral code of a nation, the secret of its greatness or the herald of its fall; while the legislature is formally proclaiming that, after all, the "social evil" is not a necessity; while the press is opening doors of utterance with increasing alacrity to the promulgators of a less ignoble creed; while the churches are tardily recognizing the existence of a pestilence walking in darkness more noisome than any that it ever entered the Psalmist's mind to conceive, and forming special associations to combat it—while all this, and more, is going forward, there are also in the air portents of a less inspiriting character which cannot be disregarded. This one of the transplanting into English soil of the typical French "realistic" novel is, in itself, of the highest significance, and demands more than passing comment.

That M. Zola's leading works, one of which has reached considerably over a hundred

editions, and all of which (we are speaking of "L'Assommoir," "Nana," and "Pot Bouille") have had a wider circulation than those of any other novelist whatever, should find persons capable of translating them, and others willing to disseminate them, is perhaps less remarkable than another circumstance to which attention will presently be drawn. Apart from the direct appeal to prurience, which, whether intentional or unintentional on the part of the author, has, of course, had more to do with their success than any other factor, and which would, equally of course, stimulate an unhealthy curiosity as to their contents beyond the limits of France, and of readers of French generally, their appearance was not only a new departure in fiction, but it was also a very remarkable psychological phenomenon, and one that had to be reckoned with. There is a healthy curiosity as well as an unhealthy curiosity with regard to matters unsavoury. Without a healthy curiosity respecting our sewers, for instance, we are not unlikely to fall a prey to



cholera or typhoid ; and it is desirable that some few persons, at any rate, should investigate our literary sewage, with the object, not so much of wiling away the hours over a piquant banquet, as of detecting and exposing a source of moral danger to the community. Even the disciple of culture, who disclaims any very exalted ethical aims, and in fact secretly considers goodness inferior to a triolet or a teapot, has the right, if he choose, to acquaint himself with the newest developments of modern fiction, from a purely intellectual standpoint, just as he has the right, if he please, to study Juvenal or Rabelais, the police reports, or the society journals. Speaking generally, so long as moral evil, in its various unsightly shapes, rears its head in the world, so long is it useless to imagine that we can any of us shut our eyes to it, and behave as if it did not exist. Deprecate it we may, but encounter it we must ; it is in the air ; it forms an appreciable part of life ; it cannot astonish us, if—as in this instance of extremely clever novels, teeming with “sensation,” and as bril-


liant in style as they are foul in subject-matter—it is deemed a legitimate article of merchandise, and thrust upon our notice like other remunerative wares.

But what is astonishing—so astonishing that it is matter of amazement to the present writer that public attention has not been drawn to the fact before now—is the support which has been lent to what, at best, can but be regarded as a somewhat equivocal commercial enterprise, by a considerable proportion of the English press. Many of the leading daily and weekly journals have for some time past prominently advertised the English edition of these novels ; their titles in large type, and sometimes with laudatory press-notices subjoined, stare one in the face in quarters which one is accustomed to associate, not merely with a conventional propriety, but with some approach to a high tone upon moral questions ; we are, in short, confronted with the astounding spectacle of a press, upon the whole, freer from what is harmful, morally, than any other in Europe, industriously dis-

seminating in the vulgar tongue, books which, even in their less accessible native dress, the leading English circulating library has declined to admit to its shelves. It is, of course, possible that, in some instances, at any rate, this *réclame* of Zola has been the result of inadvertence. Where this has been the case, the fact may well suggest to the editors and proprietors of the newspapers and periodicals in question a somewhat closer supervision of their advertising departments ; but unfortunately the offence has been too prevalent to admit of a universal application of this charitable assumption. But worse remains. These novels are not being simply advertised. They are being introduced to English readers under influential sponsorship, and it is scarcely surprising that their circulation should be allowed free course when it is seen that the copious laudatory excerpts affixed to the titles of "Nana," and the "Prelude to Nana"—"The Assommoir"—are culled from writers of no less consequence than Mr. Henry James and Signior de Amicis. With the powerful advocacy of

such names to back their enterprise the purveyors of French realistic fiction in England no doubt conceive that they have indubitable right to push their wares to the utmost of their ability ; and might very probably assume the airs of injured innocence if they were denied admission to the advertising columns of respectable journals. But for all this, I believe that it will not be impossible to show that the two distinguished "devil's advocates" to whom they are, or ought to be, so deeply indebted for their powerful championship of M. Zola, have really no case at all, and in this instance were temporarily denied or voluntarily renounced the critical faculty of discerning things which differ.


Mr. Henry James's apology for Zola is as ingenious a bit of special pleading as one might expect from so accomplished a pen ; but it is special pleading after all, and contains more than one transparent fallacy which I shall take the liberty of exposing with the candour due to the magnitude of the issues involved. Reference to the context of his



remarks is unnecessary, as the passage selected is complete in itself. Here it is :

“A novelist with a system, a passionate conviction, a great plan—incontestable attributes of M. Zola—is not now to be easily found in England or the United States, where the story-teller’s art is almost exclusively feminine, is mainly in the hands of timid (even when very accomplished) women, whose acquaintance with life is severely restricted, and who are not conspicuous for general views. The novel, moreover, among ourselves, is almost always addressed to young unmarried ladies, or at least always assumes them to be a large part of the novelist’s public.

“This fact, to a French story-teller, appears, of course, a damnable restriction, and M. Zola would probably decline to take *au sérieux* any work produced under such unnatural conditions. Half of life is a sealed book to young unmarried ladies, and how can a novel be worth anything that deals with only half of life? How can a portrait be painted (in any way to be recognizable) of half a face?



It is not in one eye, but in the two eyes together that the expression resides, and it is the combination of features that constitute the human identity. These objections are perfectly valid, and it may be said that our English system is a good thing for virgins and boys, and a bad thing for the novel itself, when the novel is regarded as something more than a simple *jeu d'esprit*, and considered as a composition that treats of life at large and helps us to *know*."

To clear the ground at starting, and also to meet half-way possible imputations of what Mr. Swinburne would call "vicious virtue" and lesser authorities the hysterics of the incorrigible Philistine, let us begin by recognizing the kernel of truth in Mr. James's reasoning, which gives it its plausibility. Though it cannot for a moment be admitted that the "story-teller's art in England and America is almost exclusively feminine," either in the sense of being exercised principally by women or of being addressed for the most part *virginibus puerisque*, there is no

doubt that the modern imaginative literature of the English-speaking races is, to a certain extent, open to the charge of prudery. It has suffered, just as the society of which it is the reflection has suffered, from the kind of tacit convention which has hitherto prevailed amongst us as to which facts of life and nature shall be recognized and represented and which shall be ignored and passed over, as though they had no reality at all. Time would fail us to trace in any detail the history of the origin and growth of this convention. Of the fact of its existence there can be no doubt. We have only to turn to the novels of Richardson and Fielding, of Smollett and Sterne, to see that a very real change in people's notions as to what may or may not be spoken of in society and treated of in fiction has arisen since their time. Now it may safely be stated concerning this change, whether we regard it in its social or its literary aspect, that, in its origin, it was neither prudish, nor hypocritical, nor illusory, but was a thing of good omen, a token of the gradual emergence

of civilized Europe out of grossness into refinement, out of selfish animalism into a nobler humanity. The French Revolution finally purified the air. The scum of its last seethings fretted itself away in lives and in writings like those of Byron ; a better day dawned afterwards, and the delicate satire of Jane Austen, the wholesome manliness of Scott, the pure ardour of Wordsworth, were among the influences that inaugurated the new era, and made the literature of the Victorian epoch what it is. But never truer line of prose or poetry was written than that one of the Laureate—


“ Lest one good custom should corrupt the world.”

There is no practice, however excellent, which, followed blindly, or protracted unduly, or pursued without a nice regard to the altered requirements brought about by changing circumstances, may not inwardly putrify, or, if it do not actually breed corruption, may not retard progress almost as seriously as wilful wrong doing. The practice of habitually

omitting, in works which were intended as faithful delineations of life, all mention of some very grave, very significant, and very considerable aspects of life, was a good one in as far as it represented a true impulse in the direction of moral purity. But it was good relatively rather than absolutely. The time came when it ceased to represent such an impulse, and then the good custom degenerated into a hollow conventionality ; instead of promoting goodness, it began to foster hypocrisy, and strengthened the always-too-prevalent tendency to confound prudery with purity. It is the function of the writer of fiction, in his capacity of artist as well as in that of moralist, to deal with the life of his day as he sees it around him, neither suppressing features which have, it may be, for the time being, assumed an undue prominence, nor, on the other hand, exaggerating their importance. Take some cognizance of them he must, on pain of forfeiting his high prerogative of holding the mirror up to nature better even than the drama, at least

in our own day, can do it ; of showing virtue her own feature, scorn her own image, and the very age and body of the time, his form and pressure. It is impossible that he can show scorn her own image without openly exhibiting those infra-human vices and follies which are worthiest of scorn ; notably in those periods where they cry aloud for special flagellation is it his duty to apply the scourge without remorse. It is perhaps scarcely criticizing modern society in the leading European capitals too severely to say that it has, during the last twenty or thirty years, merited a degree of plain speaking from those who profess to reflect even when they are without any distinct intention of educating it. In Germany the growth of cynicism and materialism, and the gospel of blood and iron ; in France, the Second Empire ; in England, the abeyance of a pure Court have been among the causes of a certain moral deterioration which must be patent to all thoughtful observers. Yet if, in these latter days, any English novelist has had the courage faithfully to discharge his or her

mission of representing society as it is rather than as it should be—if he has occasionally introduced a character, if he has here and there portrayed a scene not consistent with the etiquette which forbids the mention of such characters and such episodes, his procedure will inevitably excite comment. He will be praised with a reservation, with a grain of salt. In some quarters he will be blamed. In most families his work will be placed at any rate, on the young people's *index expurgatorius*, where it will await with the "Heart of Midlothian," with "Adam Bede," with "A Terrible Temptation," such time as the discretion of maturity shall be supposed to have replaced the knowledge-hunger of youth. Out of a thousand instances that could be cited of this prudery, a single example may be given, by way of illustration. Some two or three years ago there was published by a new writer, a short first tale of which the sole end and object was the enforcement of Dante's "*Buona e la Signoria d'Amore*." "*Good is the Seigniory of Love*,




for he withdraws the soul of his faithful servitor from all things unworthy." Of this novel one of the first living authorities on English literature wrote to its author: "I think your theme exceedingly well chosen, for it applies to the time the old lesson that was in Milton's 'Comus,' of the difference between the music with its 'sacred and homefelt delight,' its 'sober certainty of waking bliss,' and 'the song of Circe and the Sirens;' the lesson that was in Tennyson's love of Enid kindling and sustaining power, and the love of Vivien that quenched and neutralized it. The notes of the false music are so common now in what is called 'society,' that your use of the novel for another pointing of the contrast between false and true, deserves on that account alone the heartiest appreciation." Yet because, in the course of the story the song of the sirens had to be sounded, as well as the sacred home music, because the love of Vivien had to be indicated, however slightly, in order to the pointing of the contrast between its deathly

influences and the sanctifying love of Enid, the book did not escape severe criticism.

It must then be admitted that we have as a nation, or, including America, as a race, gone a little too far on a track upon which we started with the best intentions, and at the commencement, at any rate, with the best results. But from this admission to the assumption of Mr. Henry James, that the writers and the readers of the modern English novel are, in homely phrase, a parcel of schoolgirls, is a far cry. Let me try to point out some of the flaws in his extraordinary impeachment of his own fellow-craftsmen.

In the first place the majority of the leading representatives of the novelists' art are not women, but men. Whether the sum total of lady writers would outweigh numerically that of their masculine *confrères* or not, is beside the question. Very possibly it would, but it is the novelists of the first and second, not of the third and fourth, classes who ordain what the novel shall be or shall not be at any given period ; the herd merely

follow their leaders and write or read what the fashion of the day dictates. Since the death of the monarch of modern fiction, George Eliot (of whom, by the way, it could certainly not be said either that her "acquaintance with life was severely restricted," or that she was "not conspicuous for general views"), the sceptre has not been awarded to a woman—if indeed it may be said to have been claimed at all. There are, of course, a certain number of lady-writers among our principal novelists. The names of Mrs. Oliphant, Mrs. Thackeray Ritchie, and Mrs. Hodgson Burnett, will immediately occur, and others might be added of authoresses not unworthy to rank with the better class of male romancers. As the "woman movement" strengthens, as the higher education of women spreads, and as their liberation from obsolete restrictions and conventionalities based on the theory of the servitude of the sex gradually makes way, the number of female novelists of the first grade may be expected largely to increase. My contention is that at



present, and as things are now, for every half-dozen men such as Messrs. Black, Blackmore, Besant, Payn, Howells, Bret Harte—writers who give its tone to the modern novel, and ordain what it shall be or shall not be in this later nineteenth century, it would not be easy to name more than one woman.

But Mr. James proceeds to inform us that the novel, even when it is not written by women is "almost always addressed" to women—"to young unmarried ladies"—or at least that it "always assumes them to be a large part of the novelist's public." Is this so? Is it really a fact (Mr. James, speaking as one having authority, should know, but I take leave to question the assertion) that the gifted men and women who create for us out of the stores of their fancy, often of their genius, that elaborate artistic structure, charged with wit, learning, pathos, knowledge of mankind, knowledge of the world, known as the modern novel, deliberately write only for an audience of schoolgirls? It was said of old that a lady-writer wrote always with one eye on her book

and the other on some man. Are we to reverse the dictum now, and to say that men write with one eye on their book and the other on the "young girl"? Let it once more be repeated that I am not speaking of the herd, among whom there are doubtless many purveyors of schoolgirl fiction, as of other varieties; jackals of the book-market, whose business it is to supply a particular demand, and whose livelihood might suffer if they overstepped certain prescribed limits. I am dealing throughout, for reasons stated above, with the leading or typical class of romancists, men who, while they for the most part live by their writing, and are rightly proud of doing so, yet, if I am not greatly mistaken, would not for any pecuniary reward stoop to fetter their art—to pinion their genius—by addressing exclusively any one particular section of the reading-world. They write primarily because they must, not primarily—not even secondarily—because they are paid for writing. The creative impulse, strong and imperative and disinterested in them, as it is

strong and imperative and disinterested in the true musician, the true painter, the true poet—in all true artists—works from within outwards, moulding external things to its will, not submitting to be bound and conditioned by them. And if it be objected that without any deliberate preference of expediency to sincerity, without any express intention of being popular rather than of being true to the highest that he knows, a man may yet conform, almost unconsciously, to the prevailing taste, and write for the “young unmarried lady,” as it were, without knowing it, the answer is that such conformity is not, and never has been, since time began, a characteristic of genius. Genius is nothing, if not original—not in the sense of mere invention—many a man of genius has had but small measure of that faculty, as commonly understood—but in the sense of looking at things from an individual, not from an orthodox point of view ; of handling old things freshly, and conventional things daringly, and the trivial commonplaces of every day with a fine,

transforming master-touch that charms them into beauty. To my mind it seems little short of an insult to any writer above the grade of the mere average caterer for the railway-station bookstall to suppose that he would at any time consent to produce his work under such truly "unnatural conditions." Is there not a simpler and at the same time a worthier explanation of the purity of tone which happily prevails in nearly all Anglo-American novels of the first class? May it not be that the writers themselves are pure? that they detest pitch as not even the "young unmarried lady" in her supposed lofty monopoly of virtue detests it? that their aim in their books as well as in their lives is to

"Move onward, working out the brute"?


What if they naturally, and as a matter of intuition, prefer the beautiful to the vile, the manliness of chastity to the hoggerly of vice, the moral code of—let us say—Carlyle, to the moral code of—let us say—"Max O'Rell"? What if their æsthetic creed be the creed of

George Eliot—eternally true, despite of all that has been said as to fidelity of representation—that “it is for art to present images of a lovelier order than the actual, gently winning the affections, and so determining the taste”?

Upon this head more by and by. Let me proceed to my next subject of difference with Mr. James. Scarcely less extraordinary than his assumption that English novelists, out of regard for the young, unmarried lady, “deal only with half of life,” is the accompanying implication that M. Zola and his “realistic” following paint the whole. It is perfectly true that no portrait can be adequately painted which leaves out half of the face (unless, by the way, it be painted in profile, when a clever artist will contrive to make it thoroughly recognizable, and even expressive); but can it be said that M. Zola—at any rate in the three works before us—has presented us with the whole face of his brother man? If “it is not in one eye, but in the two eyes together that the expression resides,” surely M. Zola, less than any man,

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gives us both eyes ; if "it is the combination of features that constitute the human identity," surely we have a right to demand that more than one feature shall be delineated for us, that more than one phase—and that the very lowest, meanest, and ugliest phase—of human nature shall be interpreted for us by the novelist's art. Yet M. Zola's one-eyed portraits, however true to life within their limits, however incontestably real, however microscopically accurate, show us this aspect only. He sounds everlastingly the same note, and if he may be said to ring the changes at all, rings them for ever upon lust and swinishness and sordidness and ruin, upon ruin and sordidness and swinishness and lust. Whatsoever things are false, whatsoever things are dishonest, whatsoever things are unrighteous, whatsoever things are unlovely, whatsoever things are of evil report, he thinks on these things, and bids his readers think of them, till they forget that they are living in a world which has been made rich by the blood of martyrs, and beautiful by the innocence of



children ; that they are breathing the air that nourished Buddha, and that echoes still with the sayings of Jesus ; that not a stock or a stone around them but could testify to some pure human feeling, some deed of human nobleness, some humble, holy aspiration.


The utmost that can be said for this high priest of "the great goddess Lubricity," whom all "realists" and the world of Paris worship, is that, jealous of her honour, and deeming that the French novel—sufficiently free from "damnable restrictions" though it has hitherto been supposed to be—had not adequately represented the extent and the significance of her cult—he may have wished to redress the balance by calling renewed and particular attention to it. But if any such motives form part of the "great plan," the "passionate conviction," which we are told are "incontestable attributes" of M. Zola, they do so at the expense of his claim to the first, nay, to any considerable rank in fiction. Even were he inspired by a laudable desire to unmask hypocrisy, to proclaim neglected truths, and

to compel recognition of ugly realities (a desire of which after diligent search, I can find as little trace in his work as in that of the *gamin* who tries to startle us pictorially upon hoardings and doorposts), he would overreach himself by onesidedness, by disproportion, and by over-emphasis. No brilliancy of style, or graphic vigour, or masterly handling of detail can compensate for the absence of that very *wholeness* of conception and of treatment which, as we have seen, Mr. James so curiously seems to claim as the exclusive possession of Zola and his school. All sense of unity, of harmony, vanishes as we pass from one scene of pain and horror and degradation to another, as we wade through page after page of filth and of gloom unrelieved by a single gleam of nobleness or devotion, disinterestedness or worthy endeavour. It may all be as true, within its limits, as the tale of Nero's infamies or of the Czar Peter's bestiality is true ; it may all be as real as the gutter and the sewer are real. But it is easy to have too much of the gutter and the sewer

in real life ; and in art the limits assigned to their counterparts must be adhered to with a special severity. The smallest infringement of their proper boundary is perilous to a work of art, as such, apart from all other considerations ; and when it comes to their usurping the whole of that territory in which they should properly exist only upon sufferance and subject to certain clearly-defined laws, the case—artistically speaking—is desperate indeed. If we are to define the novel as “a composition that treats of life at large, and helps us *to know*,” what shall we say to novels that ignore—it is scarcely too much to say—the whole of life except its sadness, and the whole of human nature except its humiliation?


The eulogy of Signor de Amicis on “The Assommoir” contains one expression which is even stronger than any laudatory remark or implication of Mr. Henry James’s. He says that the study of Zola’s works is “like finding truth for the first time.”

“After reading Zola’s novels it seems as if in all others, even in the truest, there were a



veil between the reader and the things described, and there is present to our minds the same difference as exists between the representation of human faces on canvas and the reflection of the same faces in a mirror. It is like finding truth for the first time."

Here is praise indeed! If indeed, after lying *perdu* since time began at the bottom of a well or in any other available hiding-place, Truth stands revealed at last in the pages of M. Zola, the demand for his works abroad, and the flourish of trumpets with which they are being heralded in England, are more than justified. He is the oracle of the nineteenth century, and to say that his admirers are within their right is to state the case mildly. But, as has just been pointed out, it is this very attribute of truth—truth to life, truth to human nature, which must be denied to the artist who cannot see life or human nature as a whole. He may possess the fidelity of the photographer, nay, the accuracy of the mirror. What he sees he may reproduce with a minute exactness alto-



gether unrivalled. Yet if he sees only a little, and that little what is valueless for artistic purposes, *except in subordination—in nicely-balanced proportion*—his very “truth” becomes falsehood, and his accuracy only a snare. No doubt M. Zola “removes the veil” which has existed hitherto between readers and “things described,” and we are now able to picture to ourselves the interiors of garrets and washhouses, drinkshops and brothels, with a clearness for which we are indebted to the author of “*The Assommoir*” and “*Nana*” alone.

But the essence of art does not consist in removing veils. It consists not seldom in the drawing of veils over things the very horror of which, or else the very sacredness, the very unutterable majesty of which make words impious. Art is not mere description, mere reproduction. It is the personality, the genius, of the artist which differentiates his work from the work of the mere copyist; and it is the projection of this personality into his work which makes it a work of art at all. Scenes, things, characters—characters


above all—must be molten and re-cast for us in the furnace of his imagination, or we may as well go study them in the unvarnished, unbaptized, untransformed reality. And truly may we speak of the furnace of the imagination since, in all imaginative work of the first order, there must be a *chaleur d'âme*, an inward heat and glow which lifts it to a higher plane than that on which we toil and grieve and struggle in daily life. And it is observable that in the great artists—the De Staëls, George Eliots, Turgénieffs, Thackerays—this smouldering fire kindles into flame, as it were, in spite of themselves, on every page, breaking forth now in tremulous pathos, now in meek aspiration, now in courageous denunciation of evil, or the covert irony which is only a thwarted hunger for good. By its presence or its absence may be detected the man of genius or the talented literary mechanic.

It remains to try and reconcile what may appear to some a certain discrepancy in the foregoing remarks. It has been affirmed that

the best kind of modern novelist of either sex has an instinctive and laudable disinclination to the portrayal of vice ; and it has also been observed that within certain limits it is his or her duty to portray it. The contradiction is only apparent. The true artist may and must, at certain epochs especially, delineate evil, but he can only do so successfully on one condition, viz., *that he feels it to be evil*. The whole secret lies in the method of treatment. If the recesses of a corrupt mind are to him, like the secret dens of infamy where corruption lurks, only so much material for realistic description, for scientific analysis, then they are, or should be, for him, forbidden ground. (Of the writer who handles them from motives still less praiseworthy, it is not necessary to speak.) But if he approaches evil in the spirit—the interval may be wide, but the spirit the same—in which Dante approached it, or Spenser, or Schiller ; if he describes it in a manner which, perhaps without a single explicit word, shall convey to the writer his own detestation of it, and its own intrinsic loathsomeness ; if

he subordinates it duly to the good, and does not drown his lights in intolerable floods of shadow ; if he purges it thoroughly with his own agony, and leavens it with his indignation—then he may do what he will—he cannot harm so much as a little child.


A further examination of Mr. James's defence of the realistic novel reveals the fact that it is primarily based upon one central fallacy, out of which the minor ones we have been considering naturally arise ; the fallacy, namely, that women have in life and in literature a different moral standard from that of men. That they have been credited in the past (not quite unjustly) with the dulness of supposing that such an arrangement was in harmony with the laws of nature, nay, that they are still currently believed to acquiesce in it, cannot be controverted ; but it is strange that this superficial view should commend itself to any critic who is accustomed to think for himself, and to carefully note the signs of the times. Surely a careful study of the works of such lady-writers as Mme.




de Staël, George Sand, George Eliot, and the Brontës must demonstrate beyond question that even in the past no woman has gained the front rank in fiction without penetrating that "half of life" which is foolishly supposed to be a "sealed book" to women, without, in other words, claiming her lawful prerogative as an adult human being, and as a conscientious artist in the broadest, yet in the most tremendous, sense, responsible to God. Quite recently a bishop, addressing his diocesan conference upon a more practical subject than unfortunately often occupies the attention of diocesan conferences, referred admiringly to a great woman—Elizabeth Barrett Browning—who called things by their right names "*because she was pure.*" "We could not," he said, "walk the streets of our great towns without being moved by what one of our great poetesses—a pure-hearted woman, and *because she was pure-hearted*, not afraid to speak of the misery, the shame, and the sorrow of the outcast of her sex, said when she spoke of—

‘Thirty thousand women in one smile,
That only smile at night beneath the gas.’

And what is true of distinguished women of the earlier nineteenth century, will certainly not become less true of their successors, who have, in these latter days, witnessed many strange and unexpected developments, moral and social, and have realized that they are breathing an entirely new spiritual atmosphere, and that they are walking more and more in ways which even the greatest of their foremothers longed for dimly, without hope. That “there is no sex in mind,” is one of the most pregnant of the new truths, or, more accurately, new aspects of old truth, which they are learning on the one hand, and exemplifying on the other, and with not less scorn than that with which the best men would repudiate the suggestion that they write for women, will the best women-writers increasingly repel a similar insinuation. The reason is that for both alike moral questions have been, and are being, lifted into a different region from that which they occupied



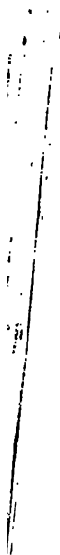
of old. Such criticism of their work as Mr. James's can really only be regarded as a kind of odd survival of that bygone time—the time when the most fastidious of moralists exacted nothing more from a man than conjugal fidelity, or from a woman than decorous imbecility ; when purity merely meant propriety, and a man's loftiest ideal was that no spot or taint of moral blame should attach to—his wife ! This old-fashioned dual code is dying hard, but it is dying ; and in those leading works of modern fiction which I have endeavoured to defend from the charge of a childish prudery, based on motives of expediency, may be studied to excellent advantage the new code which is destined to supersede it. Any man who will read through in honesty and reverence (all true art being reverend) a book like "*Lorna Doone*," a book like "*All Sorts and Conditions of Men*," like "*Madcap Violet*," like "*The Lady of the Aroostook*," or "*Louisiana*," or "*The Luck of Roaring Camp*," will need no other disproof of the wondrous assertion that these works



were written for a class, and not for the world, for the enrichment of the author's exchequer, and not for the solacement of his soul.

In that crucial interview between Tom Jones and Sophia, when the former remarks by way of extenuation of his vices: "The delicacy of your sex cannot conceive the grossness of ours, nor how little one sort of amour has to do with the heart," he is answered in the memorable words, "*I will never marry a man who shall not learn refinement enough to be as incapable as I am myself of making such a distinction.*" Venturing to paraphrase them for my purpose, I commend them to all readers who may be tempted to pay heed to the criticism which confounds outward decorum with the manful inward impulse of purity, and assigns to the sexes differing moral obligations and conflicting literary responsibilities. Let them answer with Sophia, "*I will never give ear to the critic who shall not learn refinement enough to be as incapable as are the men and women he criticises of making such a distinction.*" ✓ ~~xy~~

K'g





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